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National Quality and Patient Safety
Office of the Chief Clinical Officer



Preventing Harm: Medication Safety in the Community

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Overview

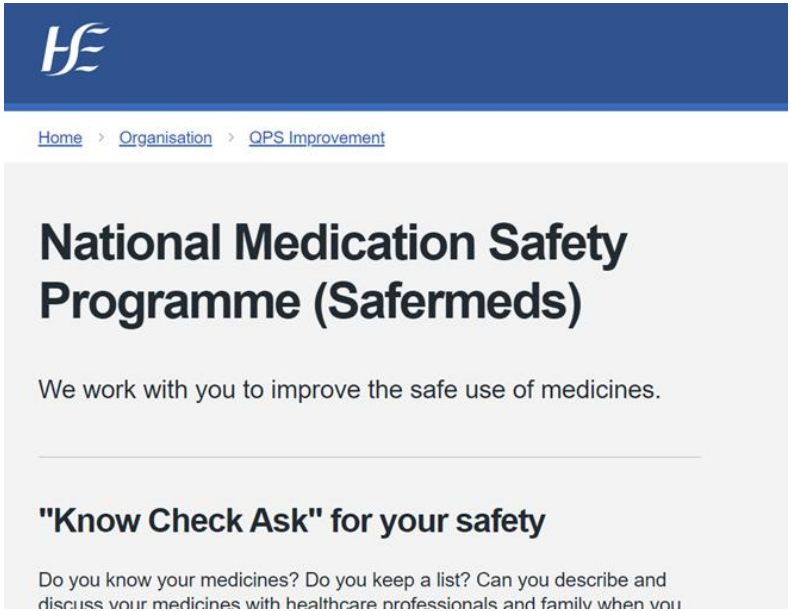
- National Medication Safety Programme
- Key Medication Safety Data
- Know, Check, Ask and HSE ‘My Medicines List’
- HSE Medicines A-Z
- Lithium Safety



National Medication Safety Programme

- Working with patients and healthcare providers to reduce patient harm associated with medicines or their omission

- Website – www.hse.ie/safermeds
- Email – safermeds@hse.ie



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Medication Safety Data

Key Data on Medication Related Harm

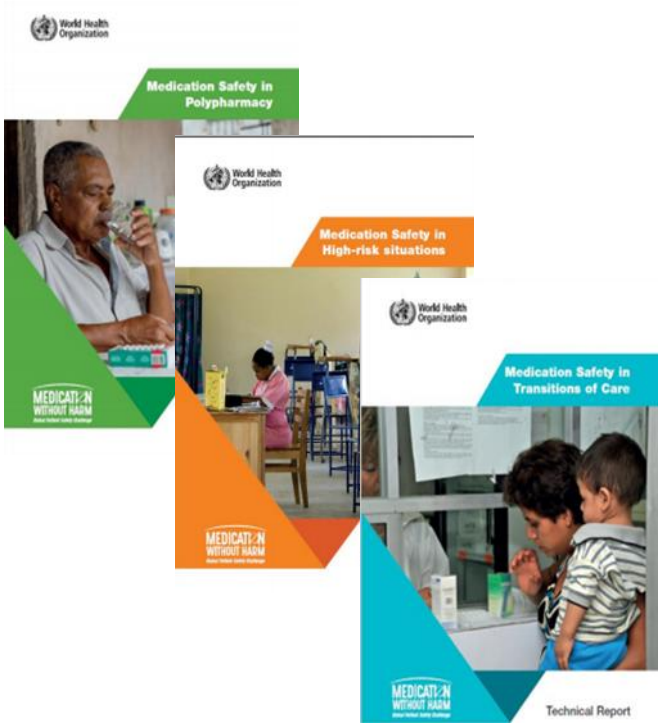
- Patient harm due to unsafe medical care is a leading cause of death and disability worldwide, and most patient harm is **avoidable**
- Almost 50% of preventable patient harm is related to medications and therapeutic interventions
- One in 20 patients experience preventable medication-related harm in medical care
- 1/4 of preventable medication related harm is considered severe or life-threatening
- Globally, the cost associated with medication errors has been estimated at $42 billion USD annually
- Harm more likely with **polypharmacy**, **high-risk medicines/situations** and at **transitions of care**



- *Panagioti M, et al. Prevalence, severity, and nature of preventable patient harm across medical care settings: Systematic review and meta-analysis. BMJ. 2019*
- *Hodkinson et al. Preventable medication harm across health care settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis. BMC Med. 2020*
- *WHO report: Global burden of preventable medication-related harm in health care : A systematic review 2023*

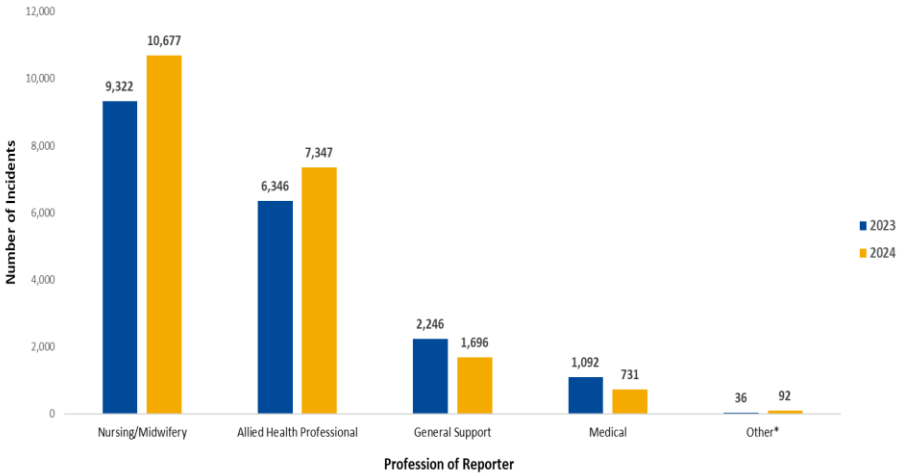
Medication Without Harm:
WHO Global Patient Safety Challenge

Medication is the most common cause of avoidable harm in healthcare

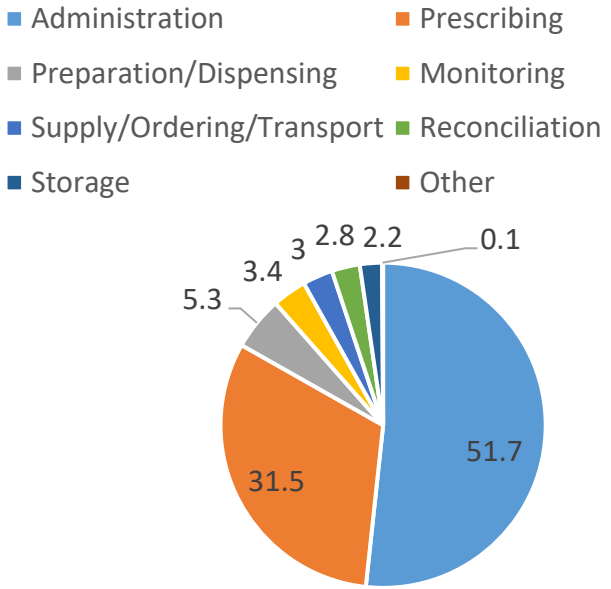




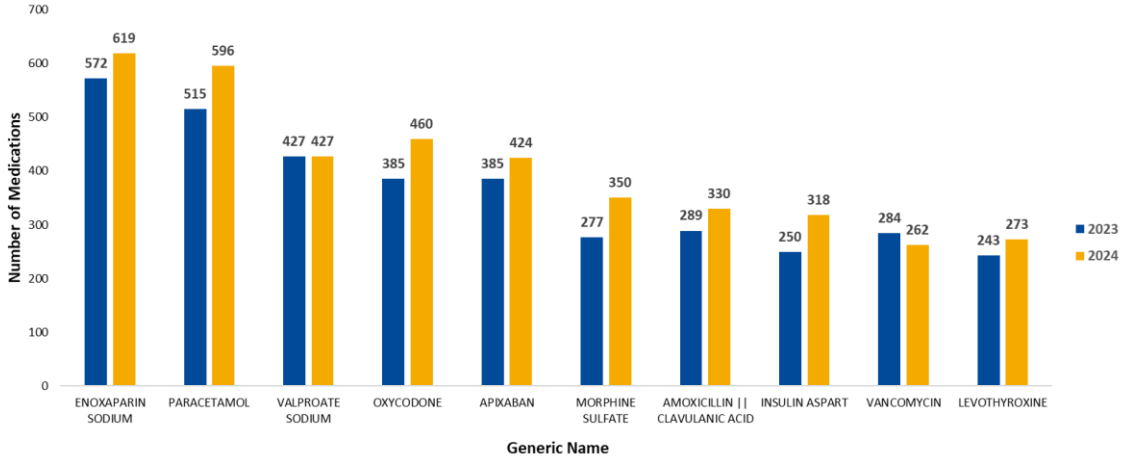
State Claims Agency – December 2025

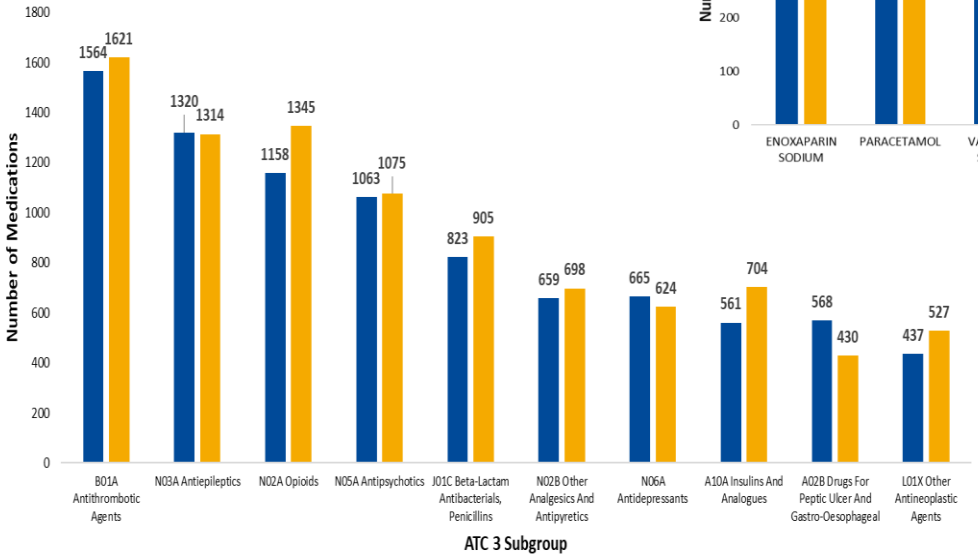


Medication Incidents by Stage of Process 2023/24



State Claims Agency – December 2025





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Know, Check, Ask
HSE 'My Medicines List'



Know, Check, Ask

- **Know Check Ask** is a medication safety campaign developed to support the WHO's 3rd Global Patient Safety Challenge: Medication Without Harm.
- The aim of the campaign is to encourage those taking medication and their caregivers to take an active role in managing their medication, to help increase awareness of, and educate the public about, the importance of using medication safely.
- It also encourages healthcare professionals to Know the medicines they are using, Check the details and Ask the patient if they understand.
- Supports people to be more involved in decisions about their medication, encourage them to report issues and concerns about their medication and to keep an up-to-date 'My Medicines List'.

A Medicines List

- Everyone who takes regular medicines is encouraged to keep an up-to-date list of their current medication.
- It is a self-management and **communication tool.**
- Share with anyone involved in your healthcare.
- Share it with staff at all healthcare appointments.

Make it easy to use, available.

Ask for it.

Give it back!



Keep an up to date List and Bring it to Appointments

- Resources for **lists, posters, videos** on www.hse.ie/safermeds
- List has been translated to **52 languages**
- To order copies of blank medicines lists in English, go to www.healthpromotion.ie, sign up for an account (free of charge) and search for 'medicines'
- **Promotional video** - why and how to use a list







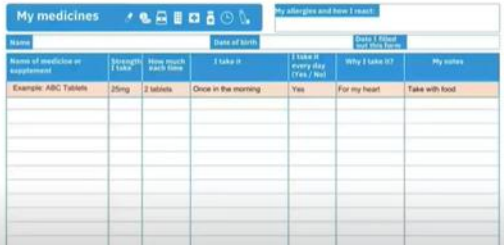
Do you take medicines?



Keep a photo of it on your phone



A medicines list can help anyone who takes medicines and those involved in their healthcare



https://youtu.be/-92LfGenHbo?si=TSPHiXemibHx5eEi



Before you take it...

KNOW your medicines and keep a list

CHECK that you are using the right medicine the right way

ASK your healthcare professional if you're unsure

My pharmacy's name	
Phone number	
My family doctor's name	
Phone number	
Emergency contact name	
Phone number	

What is My Medicines List?
My Medicines List is a list of all the medicines and supplements you take.

Why should I use it?
Keeping an up-to-date list can help you know your medicines. It can also help you when discussing your medicines with a healthcare professional.

How should I fill it in?
To fill out My Medicines List, you need all your medicines in front of you. Another option is to ask your pharmacist to print out a list for you. Make sure you include all prescribed and over-the-counter medicines and supplements.

How should I use it?
Keep your list up to date. Bring it with you when attending any healthcare appointment. You may find it useful to keep a photo of this list on your phone.

How can I get another form?
To get another copy, you can print from www.safermeds.ie or ask for a copy at your local pharmacy.

Plain English

Information for people who take medicines and their families

My Medicines List

KNOW
CHECK
ASK

My medicines

My allergies and how I react:

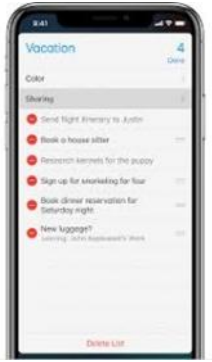
Name | Date of birth | Date I filled out this form

Name of medicine or supplement	Strength	How much I take each time	I take it	I take it every day (Yes / No)	Why I take it?	My notes
Example: ABC Tablets	25mg	2 tablets	Once in the morning	Yes	For my heart	Take with food

This document belongs to the person named above. If taking a copy, return the original to the person.

My Medicines List - Tips

- Some people find it useful to keep a **photo** of this list on their phone **or** take a photo of your medicines with the labels in full view.
- It can be helpful to **share** this list with a family member or carer
- Bring this list with you when attending **any healthcare appointment**
- **Do not assume your healthcare team member will have this information**
- **Changes to your medicines?**
  - Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse to explain any changes to your medicines
  - It's important to keep the list up-to-date by adding any new medicines to the list or drawing a line through any medicines you no longer take



HSE Ireland
@HSELive

"Such a simple tool to help me manage my various medications and really useful for my doctors" double lung transplant recipient, Gordon Ryan on the advantages of the #KnowCheckAsk medicines list. Learn more and download your list here: bit.ly/2Jlj3RX



Peter Mcdonagh
@pjsmcd24

In #MRHPortlaoise celebrating World Patient Safety day, 17th September. #PTSafetyHse #KnowCheckAsk









Suggested Actions

- Enclose a ‘My Medicines List’ with **appointment letters**, in **admission/discharge packs**
- Display posters and videos in **waiting rooms or public areas** and make blank lists available
- Facilitate residents to compile and maintain their own medication list with the support of family, if required
- Promote ‘My Medicines List’ and ‘Know, Check, Ask’ at **public events** and this and eLearning at **staff events**



Key Questions

Is it reliable?

- People who use a list could recall their medicines more accurately (65%) than those who did not (21%)[1]
- Part of Best Possible Medication History taking process – discussion, verify with reliable source, discussion



Who fills it in?

- Benefits to person filling it in themselves, with family/carers
- List from pharmacy alternative/aid
- Healthcare professionals can support in some settings

Evaluation of 'Know, Check, Ask Campaign

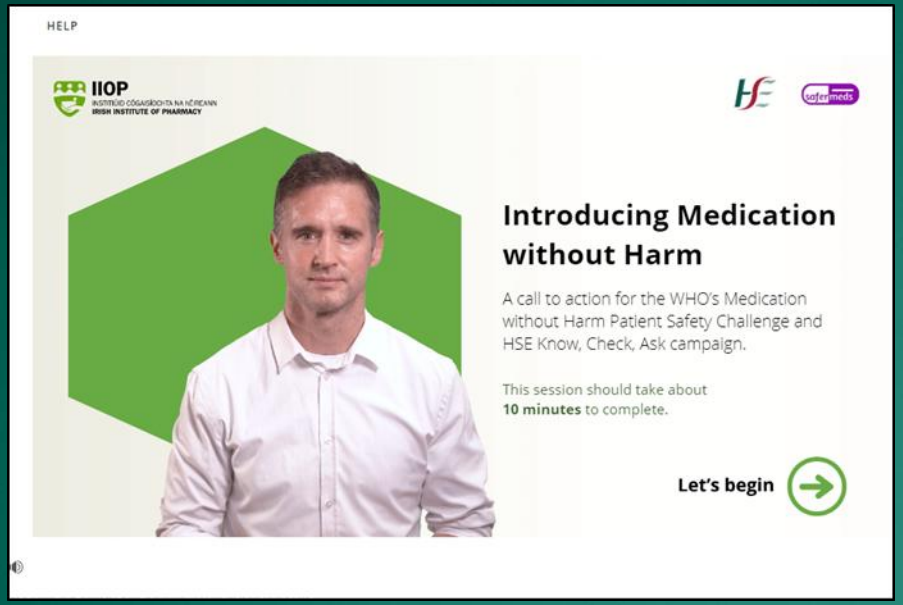
- Positive response to the campaign message and materials.
- Lists used in a variety of situations
- Complexity and concern about emergencies among drivers for use
- Limited awareness of purpose and value of keeping a list, but considered beneficial.
- Concerns about accuracy, healthcare staff time constraints, ability of people with multiple medicines or cognitive impairment to manage.
- Reliability – People who use a list could recall their medicines more accurately (65%) than those who did not (21%)[1]. Part of **Best Possible Medication History** taking process.
- Time – benefits to person filling it in themselves, with family/carer assistance if appropriate. List from pharmacy is an alternative. Healthcare professionals can support in some settings.
- Facilitators - Promotion of lists by healthcare staff and access to digital/compact lists

BMJ Open

'Everyone should know what they're on': a qualitative study of attitudes towards and use of patient held lists of medicines among patients, carers and healthcare professionals in primary and secondary care settings in Ireland

Bernadine O'Donovan [1], Ciara Kirke,[2] Muriel Pate,[2] Sheena M Mc Hugh,[3] Kathleen E Bennett [1], Caitriona Cahir [1]





Available on HSELand and IIOP platforms

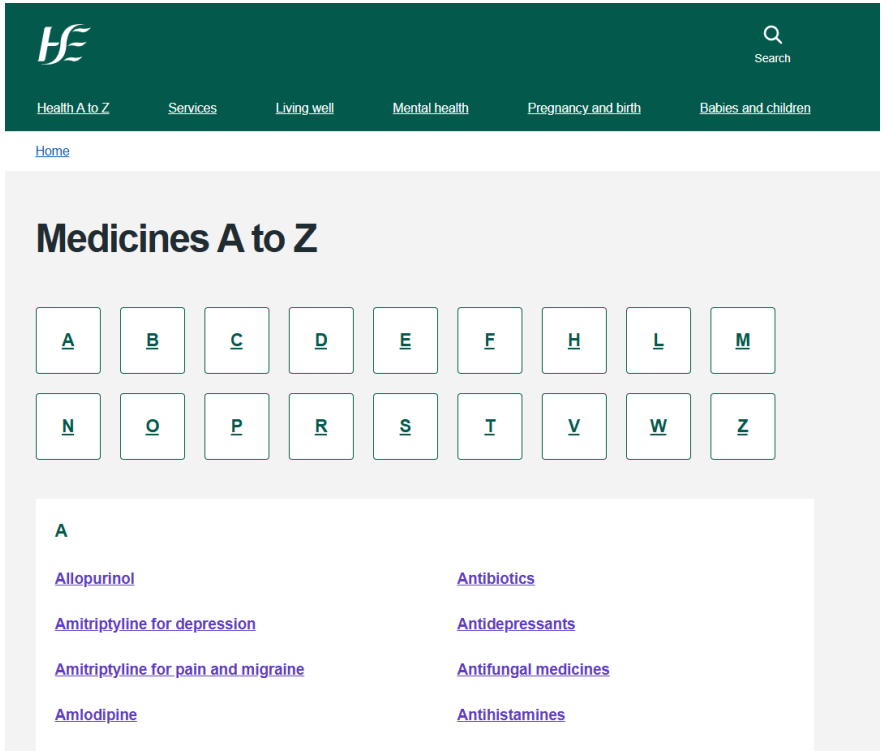


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HSE Medicines A-Z

HSE Medicines A-Z

- Top 50 most commonly prescribed medicines in alphabetical order
- Links to information on accessing patient information leaflets if the medicine is not listed
- **Frequency**: 677,920 page views in 2024
- **Time**: 2 minute 3 seconds (average)
- NHS content, adapted for Ireland, process of plain English check, clinical checks
- More development to come shortly



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Lithium Safety

Medication Safety Incidents

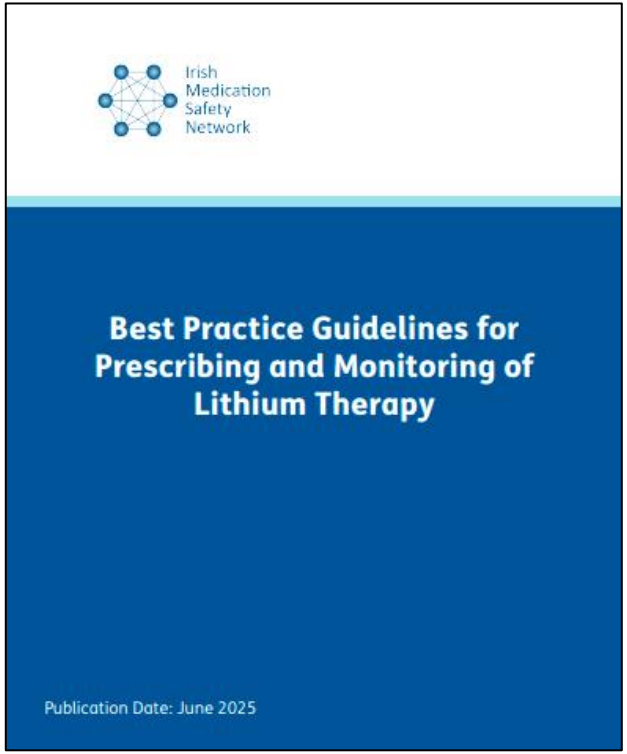
- Patients, with previously very stable lithium levels, developing severe lithium toxicity after starting on medicines that interact with lithium such as anti-inflammatories or diuretics
- Signs and symptoms of lithium toxicity (tremor, forgetfulness, unsteady gait, functional decline & unable to hold a glass) not identified and dealt with urgently
- Equivalent doses not taken into account when switching from liquid to tablet formulations of lithium

https://imsn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Lithium-v3.pdf

IMSN Best Practice Guidelines for Prescribing and Monitoring of Lithium Therapy

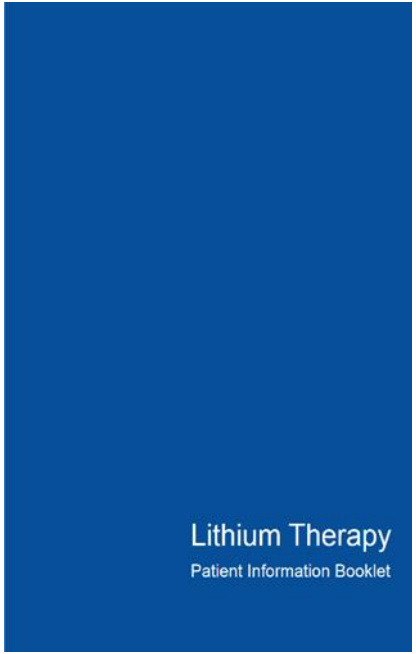
- **Key Recommendations**
  - Monitoring at appropriate intervals
  - Management of lithium toxicity
  - Patient and carer information
  - Local policies and procedures
  - Arrangements for monitoring and communication of blood test results as well as prescribing explicitly agreed

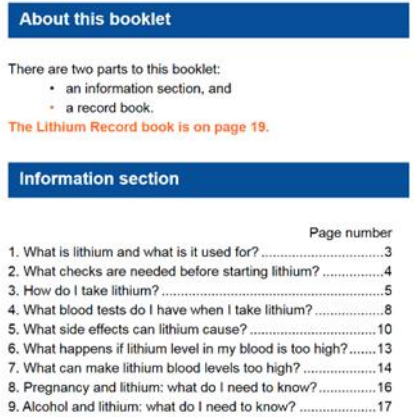
https://imsn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Lithium-v3.pdf



Lithium Therapy Patient Information Booklet

- Collaboration between **Saint John of God Hospital Pharmacy Department**, the HSE National Medication Safety Programme, and the Irish Pharmacy Union
- **Aim:** Promote and support safer lithium therapy and empower patients to engage with their Healthcare Professional to discuss all aspects of lithium therapy, monitoring, and side-effects
- Edited and reviewed by the NALA and has successfully been awarded the plain English mark.
- Reviewed by the IMSN, the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland and the ICGP
- Two parts: Patient information Section and Record Book





About this booklet

There are two parts to this booklet:
- an information section, and
- a record book.

The Lithium Record book is on page 19.

Information section

Page number

1. What is lithium and what is it used for? 3
2. What checks are needed before starting lithium? 4
3. How do I take lithium? 5
4. What blood tests do I have when I take lithium? 8
5. What side effects can lithium cause? 10
6. What happens if lithium level in my blood is too high? 13
7. What can make lithium blood levels too high? 14
8. Pregnancy and lithium: what do I need to know? 16
9. Alcohol and lithium: what do I need to know? 17

https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/Lithium_Therapy_Patient_Information_Booklet.pdf

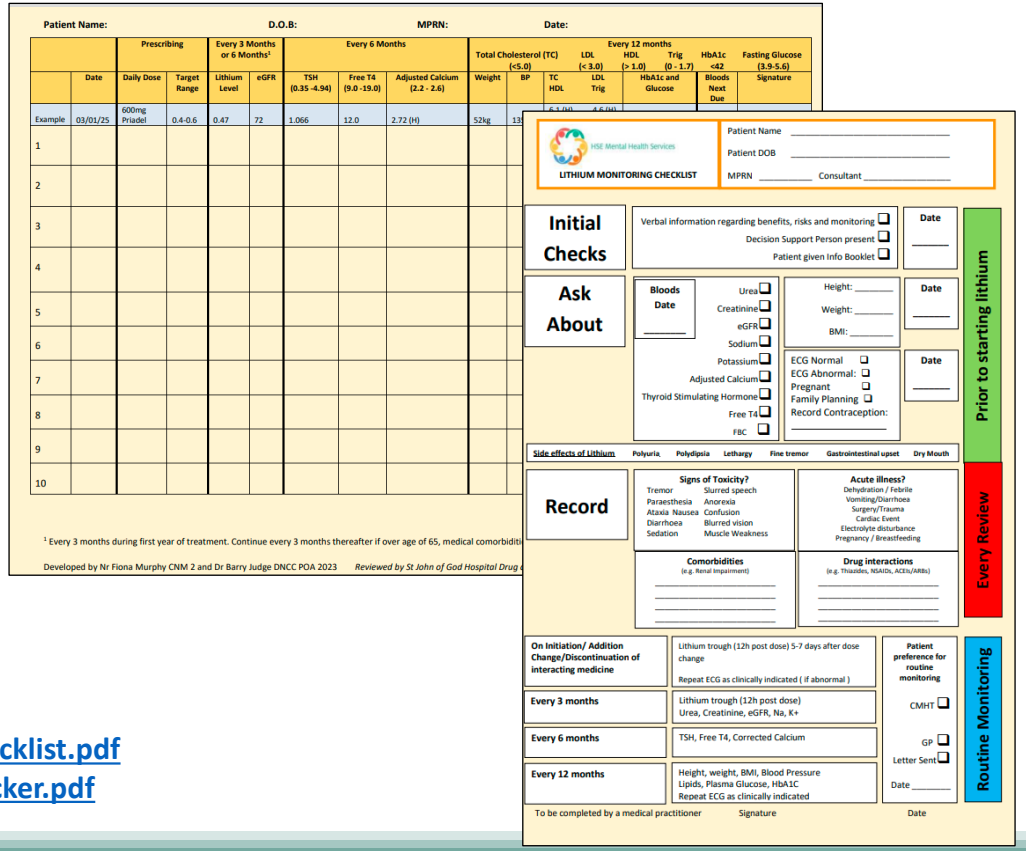
Lithium Therapy Patient Information Booklet

- Updated in September 2025 – Version 3
- To order copies of the updated booklet, please use the Smart Survey link - https://surveys.hse.ie/s/EAFX45/
- Key changes
  - Indications updated to include treatment of aggressive or self-harming behaviours
  - Expanded information on using liquid formulation and missed doses
  - Additional detail on using lithium in pregnancy



Lithium Therapy Checklist and Tracker

- Developed by **HSE Mental Health Services, Dublin North County and Dublin North City and West** to compliment the Lithium Therapy Patient Information Booklet
- **Aim:** Support safe, regular and appropriate monitoring of people prescribed lithium, before initiation and at every review
- Reviewed by the National Medication Safety Programme and Saint John of God Hospital Drugs and Therapeutics Committee
- The documents can be downloaded and adapted for local use



https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/Lithium_Therapy_Checklist.pdf
https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/Lithium_Therapy_Tracker.pdf

Take Home Messages

- **Unsafe medication practices and medication errors** are a leading cause of injury and avoidable harm in health care systems across the world. Most patient harm is **preventable**
- **You can support medication safety** through practicing your own safe processes and through supporting **patient empowerment** and involvement in medicines management and safety
- **'Know Check Ask'** supports patient involvement in decisions about their medication, encourages the reporting of issues and concerns about their medication and using up-to-date '**My Medicines List'**
- **Lithium** is a potentially toxic medicine with a narrow therapeutic index and recognised adverse effects on renal and thyroid function
- Resources available to support safe **lithium** prescribing, monitoring and patient education
- Signpost patients and colleagues to **reputable medicines management resources**
  - Know, Check, Ask/My Medicines List – www.hse.ie/safermeds
  - HSE Medicines A-Z



Join us in achieving...

Medication Without Harm



MEDICATION WITHOUT HARM
Global Patient Safety Challenge

World Health Organization

Thank you!