Why do I need to take my medicine before food or on an empty stomach?

Some medicines need to be taken before food or on an empty stomach.

To find out about your medicine you should check:

• the information leaflet that comes with your medicine
• the product packaging or
• the pharmacy dispensing label

There could be a number of reasons for having to take your medicine before food or on an empty stomach, such as:

• food may get in the way, stopping the medicine from working properly
• occasionally, food can increase the amount of medicine that gets into your body, meaning you might get more side effects
• some medicines need to work directly on the stomach, so won’t really work unless your stomach is empty

Your pharmacist or doctor will be able to give you the specific reason why, just ask.

How long do I have to wait before I can eat?
If you need to take a medicine before food or on an empty stomach, this usually means at least 30 minutes before eating, or at least 1 hour after eating. But follow any specific instructions given with your medicine.

Does it matter if I don’t take my medicine before food or on an empty stomach?
It does matter, but it is not likely to be a problem if you do it just once or twice, and it may be better than skipping a dose. Under normal circumstances though, you should follow the advice that came with your medicines carefully.

If you’re finding it difficult to take your medicine as instructed, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

If you have any questions about your medicines

Speak to your pharmacist
Your local pharmacist (chemist) can provide expert advice on medicines.

Our medicines helpline
If you are a patient of University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust* and have questions about your medicines after your hospital visit, you can call our medicines helpline on 023 8120 6907 (Monday to Friday 9am to 6.30pm) or email medicinesinformation@uhs.nhs.uk

*includes Southampton General Hospital; Royal South Hants or Princess Anne Hospital; Countess Mountbatten House and New Forest Birth Centre.