


How Can a Specialty Pharmacist

Help With My

MS Medications?

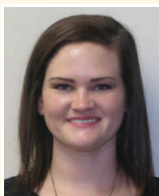


*Information
for people
with multiple
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How Can a Specialty Pharmacist Help With My MS Medications?

*Information for people with
multiple sclerosis and their care partners*

Are you taking a disease-modifying therapy (DMT) for multiple sclerosis (MS), or another high-cost or complex drug therapy? If so, your medication may come from a specialty pharmacy. Specialty pharmacies are needed for some medications. These drugs require extra steps to ensure they are:

- **Distributed properly**
- **Used safely**
- **Monitored appropriately**

A specialty pharmacist can help you with many of the steps to start or to continue your MS therapy.

This brochure explains how you can work with your specialty pharmacist and answer common questions about this process.

“ Many people with MS don't take advantage of the specialty pharmacist as a resource. The specialty pharmacist is one of the best places to turn to get help with your medications. **”**

—JACQUELYN BAINBRIDGE, PHARM.D
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT DENVER

Specialty pharmacists and multiple sclerosis

According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS), about one-third of health insurance or managed care organizations in the U.S. place all of their covered MS drugs in the specialty category, or “tier.” This means that you would need to get any prescription for an MS drug through a specialty pharmacy. The specialty pharmacy is in place to monitor the use of these drugs because of their high cost, and because extra safety steps are needed for some treatments.

What are specialty pharmacies?

Specialty pharmacies focus on “high-cost, high-touch” medications for complex disease states. Specialty drugs often include injectable agents, but they can also include drugs taken by mouth. If you are getting your drug through a specialty pharmacy, the specialty pharmacist may work directly for your insurance company, or for a medication access program.

Why do I need to work with a specialty pharmacist?

Did you try to go directly to your local pharmacy, only to be told that you can’t pick up your prescription? If you usually get your prescriptions from a community pharmacy, the procedures needed to obtain medications through a specialty pharmacy may seem complicated or time-consuming. The specialty pharmacist can

help you through these steps—so it's important to make that connection early on and learn how the specialty pharmacist can assist you.

How do I contact the specialty pharmacist?

When you discuss your prescription with your MS care team (doctor or MS nurse), you may have received documents or a contact phone number to get you started on the medication. The specialty pharmacy that provides your medication will also provide contact information in case you have any questions. Some information may be available online. But feel free to call the phone number provided to get help. You may need to create a username and password on a website to get started. If so, be sure to save that information with the documents you received from your doctor to make it more convenient when you need to log in or speak to a representative.

The specialty pharmacist may work directly with your doctor or other members of the health-care team and help to communicate important questions or concerns.

“ A specialty pharmacist has knowledge about things like drug interactions. . .such as whether your MS therapy might interact with an herbal supplement, cannabis, or other alternative treatment. ”

How can a specialty pharmacist help with a new prescription for an MS medication?

Perhaps you have just received a new diagnosis of MS or you are about to start on a new medication. For many MS drugs, it's not a simple matter of starting treatment as soon as you leave your doctor's office. A few steps must be completed before you take your first dose of medicine. For example:

- Your health insurance company may need to approve, or “preauthorize” the treatment. This means they check that the therapy is right for your diagnosis before they agree to cover the payments.
- Certain medical tests may be needed before you can start your treatment. This may include blood tests, heart rhythm or cardiac studies, eye exams, or vaccinations.
- If you were taking a different MS drug first, you may require a wait time (called a “washout period”) before starting the new treatment.
- You may need special instructions about how and when to take the medication, how to give yourself an injection (for some drugs), how to store the drug, and how to monitor for side effects or concerns.

New Prescription for an MS Medication

Specialty pharmacists may be involved with:

Preauthorization

- Review records to ensure this drug is safe for your use
- Make sure this drug is appropriate for your condition



Tests you need before starting treatment

- Help arrange blood tests
- Check on required screening (pregnancy, tuberculosis skin test, etc.)
- Recommend vaccinations



Financial coverage and assistance

- Help with claims
- Assist with co-payment or other coverage questions



Instructions for taking your new medication

- Dosage instructions
- Training for self-injection (if you use an injectable drug)
- Tips for taking the drug (e.g., timing with meals, pre-medications)



Answering questions about side effects

- How does this affect other drugs I may be taking?
- What side effects or changes should I be aware of?
- How to minimize side effect occurrence



How can a specialty pharmacist help me to renew a prescription or change medications?

MS medications are long-term therapies. To use them on a regular basis, you may need to have some medical tests performed periodically. The specialty pharmacy may need to verify that these are done before you can renew the prescription. You may also need follow up with your MS care provider periodically to evaluate how your MS is being controlled while you are on the treatment.

An unplanned delay or gap in therapy does not allow your MS drug to work in the way it is meant to. To prevent delays, it may be necessary to contact the specialty pharmacist in advance to make sure all the required steps are completed before you attempt to renew a prescription.

What if you are changing to a different MS medication, or would like to request a switch? You will need to discuss this with your MS care team, but the specialty pharmacist can be a resource. For example, the pharmacist can answer questions about common side effects or dosage instructions for other medications. The pharmacist may be able to tell you if any medical conditions you have might rule out using a particular medication.

Ongoing Treatment

Specialty pharmacists may be involved with:

Oversee required safety monitoring

- Blood tests
- Blood pressure monitoring and other health screenings
- Communicate results to healthcare provider



Taking your medication correctly

- Follow-up appointments or refill reminders
- Tips for taking the medication
- Educating your care partner about medications



Side effect management

- How to manage side effects
- Communicating with your healthcare provider
- Assess severity of side effects



Monitoring changes in health status

- Test results that may affect your treatment or dosage
- New medical conditions (such as a pregnancy or a new disease)
- If your MS symptoms have changed or worsened



Working with your MS healthcare team

- Discuss possible need to change therapy
- Report any safety issues or concerns
- Ongoing disease or medication monitoring



How can a specialty pharmacist help with financial matters?

Part of the specialty pharmacist's job is to make sure all the documentation is completed so the prescription can be filled in a timely manner. This may also involve some of the financial documents. You may have questions about your role in this. For example:

- How can I get assistance with copayments?
- If I want to apply for assistance, what information do I need to provide?
- How do Medicare or Medicaid coverage affect paying for my medication?
- What do I do if there is a change in my insurance?

Ask your healthcare provider or specialty pharmacist what options are available to you. The pharmacist can help direct you to resources you might not know about.



Financial and Administrative Steps

Specialty pharmacists may be involved with:

Financial and administrative roles



- Assist with financial questions and problems
- Get assistance with copayments or coverage
- Help facilitate prior authorization process

Changes in insurance coverage



- How do I get approved for treatment on the new insurance plan?
- Avoid extended gaps in treatment

Working with your MS healthcare team



- Discuss possible need to change therapy
- Report safety issues or concerns
- Address insurance policy or coverage changes

“ A common problem that people encounter is a delay in getting their MS medicine. A specialty pharmacist may be able to act on your behalf to facilitate the needed steps and reduce the lag time. ”

What is a REMS program, and how does it affect me?

Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) programs put extra restrictions on certain drugs because they have certain safety risks or require extra monitoring. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires REMS programs for certain drugs for your safety and to help balance these risks.

The REMS involves an agreement between the prescriber, the pharmacy, and the patient. Drugs with a REMS program can only be distributed through certain pharmacies. Doctors or other healthcare providers who want to prescribe the drug must register with the REMS. All parties agree to follow their part of the program, to ensure that the drug is used as safely as possible.

When you sign up to participate in the REMS program, you usually need to indicate that you understand the REMS instructions and that you agree to follow the steps.

“Specialty pharmacists and pharmacies are here to help you on your MS journey. Please reach out to your specialty pharmacy any time you have questions or concerns.”

To Do Your Part in a REMS Program, You May Need to Follow Some of These Steps

**See your healthcare
provider at the
recommended
times**



**Have testing done
on schedule**



**Report certain side
effects to your
doctor and the REMS
program if requested**



**Report any pregnancies
that occur while on
therapy to your doctor
and to the drug's
pregnancy registry**



Your MS healthcare provider may also share patient education materials,

usually called the Medication Guide, when discussing your prescription.

What is a Medication Guide?

Medication guides include:

The name of the medication

What conditions the drug is used for

How the medication works or is thought to work

Side effects that may be associated with the medication (including common and more rare side effects)

Detailed instructions on how to administer the medication

When to contact your doctor or MS care provider while on treatment

Whether you should be careful about taking other drugs or certain foods in combination with the medication



MS News, Support, and Self-Help Groups

The Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers
www.msca.org

The International Organization of Multiple Sclerosis Nurses
www.iomsn.org

Can Do Multiple Sclerosis
www.mscando.org

MS Views & News
<http://www.msviews.org/msviewsandnews4>

MS World
www.msworld.org

Multiple Sclerosis Association of America
<http://mymsaa.org>, 800-532-7667

Multiple Sclerosis International Federation
www.msif.org

Multiple Sclerosis Foundation
www.msfocus.org, 888-MSFOCUS
(888-673-6287)

National Multiple Sclerosis Society
www.nationalmssociety.org, 800-344-4867



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