How to Create a Pill Card

Prepared for:
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
540 Gaither Road
Rockville, MD 20850
www.ahrq.gov

Contract No. 290-00-0011

Prepared by:
The Pharmacy Intervention for Limited Literacy (PILL) Study Research Team

Investigators
Kara L. Jacobson, M.P.H., C.H.E.S.
Sunil Kripalani, M.D., M.Sc.
Julie A Gazmararian, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Karen J. McMorris, B.A.

AHRQ Publication No. 08-M016
February 2008

This user's guide was produced under contract to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) under Contract No. 290-00-0011 T07. The AHRQ Task Order Officer for this project was Cindy Brach, M.P.P. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provided funding for this guide. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Program Officer was Pamela S. Dickson, M.B.A.

The findings and conclusions in this document are those of the authors, who are responsible for its contents; the findings and conclusions do not necessarily represent the views of AHRQ, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, or the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Therefore, no statement in this guide should be construed as an official position of AHRQ, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, or the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Citation: Jacobson KL, Kripalani S, Gazmararian JA, McMorris KJ. How to Create a Pill Card. (Prepared under contract No. 290-00-0011 T07.) AHRQ Publication No. 08-M016. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. February 2008.

For more information about development and use of an illustrated medicine card such as this pill card in a patient population, please consult the following reference:

Kripalani S, Robertson R, Love-Ghaffari MH, et al. Development of an illustrated medication schedule as a low-literacy patient education tool. *Patient Education and Counseling*. 2007;66:368-377.

How to Create a Pill Card

Use this guide to find out how you can create an easy-to-use "pill card" for your patients, parents, or anyone you know who has a hard time keeping track of their medicines.

Why Create a Pill Card?

Many people have trouble keeping track of their medicines. A pill card is a simple, visual way to show all of the medicines that a person needs to take on a regular basis. Medicines taken "as needed" should not be included on the pill card since they do not follow a regular daily schedule. The pill card uses pictures and simple phrases to show each medicine, its purpose, how much to take, and when to take it. It is easier to understand than the complicated information and instructions that typically come with medicines.

This guide provides step-by-step instructions for creating a pill card for a pretend patient, Sarah, who takes simvastatin, furosemide, and insulin.

What You Will Need to Create a Pill Card:

1. A computer with word processing software
2. A color printer (note: the pill card may also be printed on a black and white printer and colored in by hand after printing)
3. Information for all of the medicines that you wish to include on the pill card
4. The actual medicines that you wish to include on the pill card

Getting Ready to Create a Personalized Pill Card

Before we start to create the actual card, we need to organize the medicine information that we want to include on the card and find pictures to represent the information.

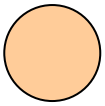
We will create a table to organize all of the information. This table includes:

- the name of each medicine,
- how much of each medicine (the dose) and what it does, which can be found on the package insert or bottle label, and
- suggestions for ways to show this information using pictures.

Use this table as a guide to create your own outline of the information that you want to include on the card for each medicine. The template provided on page 9 includes pictures to represent four different times of day that medicine may need to be taken—morning, afternoon, evening, and night/bedtime. You will also need to find pictures to represent what each medicine is used for (e.g. a blood pressure cuff to represent high blood pressure). You may use the pictures in this guide, if appropriate. It may be helpful to consult the doctor or pharmacist to determine each medication's purpose.

The graphics used in guide are from the Clip Art library of Microsoft Word.

Table 1: Organize Information for the Pill Card

Medicine	Important Information, in Simple Terms	Incorporating This Information into a Pill Card	Possible Graphics Used
 Simvastatin 20mg	• Take 1 pill at night • For cholesterol	• Picture of one pill at night/bedtime (shown by moon)	• Night/bedtime 
 Furosemide 20mg	• Take 2 pills in the morning and 2 pills in the evening • For fluid	• Picture of two pills in the morning (shown by rising sun) and two pills in the evening (shown by setting sun)	• Morning  • Evening 
Insulin 	• Inject 24 units before breakfast and 12 units before dinner • For diabetes (sugar)	• Picture of syringe in the morning (shown by rising sun) and evening (shown by setting sun). • Picture of bag of sugar	• Syringe  • Sugar  • Morning  • Evening 

Pill Card Template

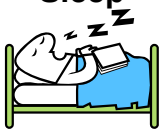
Name	**Used For**	**Instructions**	**Morning** 	**Afternoon** 	**Evening** 	**Night** 

Common Pill Shapes

Use these shapes to represent each of the pills that you are including on the pill card. Shapes are included for whole and half pills. You will need to copy the shape that you need and paste it onto the pill card. You will then need to color the shape to match the color of the actual pill. You can do this by double-clicking on the shape to bring up the Format AutoShape box. In the Colors and Lines tab under Fill, click on the Color drop-down menu to choose the appropriate color. You may also color in the shapes by hand after printing out the card.

Rounded rectangle	Round pill	Diamond pill	Oval pill	Two-tone capsule
Half rounded rectangle	Half round pill	Half diamond pill	Half oval pill	Square pill

Common Images for Medication Uses

Heart 	**Blood Pressure** 	**Diabetes/Sugar** 	**Pain** 
Depression 	**Sleep** 	**Asthma/ Breathing** 	