

Read this important information about

# MEDICATION PARAMETERS



**M**edical orders for prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs may require additional instructions called parameters. Parameters ensure the medication is properly given. Additional parameters may be necessary for scheduled medications but are more common for “pro re nata” PRN (as needed) medications. All PRN medications must have written parameters determined by an authorized professional. Professionals include the prescriber, facility registered nurse (RN), or other RNs working with the client such as home health, hospice or community RN. To ensure a caregiver gives a medication correctly, the prescriber or the (RN) must explain, in writing, any order that does not contain clear objective measures.

## Carefully designed parameters ensure:

- Clear communication;
- Fewer variations in how medications are administered;
- Reduces the potential for under and over treatment; and
- Prevents medication errors.

Examples of medication orders that require parameters:

## PRN medications

Orders given for prescription medications “as needed” or PRN must have specific parameters. Parameters must state what the medication is for and specifically when, how much and how often the medication may be administered. Multiple PRN medications for the same must state the in which order they are to be given. All information regarding the medication and parameters must be available for the caregiver to review before the resident receives the medication.

## Range orders

A medication order may have directions called range orders for both scheduled and PRN medications. Range orders include dose ranges (e.g. 1-2 tablets), frequency ranges (e.g. 4-6 hours) or a combination of dose and frequency ranges. Range orders must have written parameters such as, for pain medication directing the caregiver to:

- Use a pain scale to determine the number of tablets to be given.
- Give one tablet of a pain medication initially and then administer another tablet in two hours if no pain relief.

**In medicine, parameters are specific instructions that you can measure.**

**Examples are as follows:**

- Giving one tablet for pain when the person has a four on a pain scale.
- Giving two tablets when the person has pain greater than five on a pain scale.
- Taking a person’s temperature or blood pressure.

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## Other parameters

Other types of information needed before administering medications

- All PRN medications must have:
  - The reason the medication is to be given (what is the disease or condition being treated); and
  - Signs and symptoms on when to give the medication. *The prescriber, the facility nurse or other nurse working with the resident determines these.*
- All pain medication ordered (scheduled or PRN) must identify the specific type of pain being treated. For example for after hip surgery an order that only states “as needed” or “for pain” is not acceptable and the order must indicate for hip pain.
- If the resident gets a medication based on signs and symptoms, the RN or the prescriber needs to supply additional parameters. For example, a resident may have medication to lower blood pressure and an order to check blood pressure. Therefore, there should be specific parameters on when to hold the medication and when to contact the prescriber. The blood pressure value must be in the parameters.

- PRN medications may have multiple uses and multiple reasons for the order. However, each use must clearly state specific indicators. For example, acetaminophen is both a pain and fever reliever. The order may direct to use for either pain or as a fever reliever. Orders for any medication used to relieve fever must state how high the temperature is before being treated.

- If there is a medication order to give the medication as a scheduled and PRN, the instructions must indicate how soon after the scheduled dose to give the PRN medication.

A pain medication example, give acetaminophen 325 mg one tablet by mouth (PO) for mild hip pain. If pain is moderate to severe, give Norco (acetaminophen and hydrocodone) 5/325 mg one tablet PO for hip pain.

- Multiple PRN medications for the same signs and symptoms must list the order (sequence) of when to give each medication.

An example of multiple bowel medication orders: Give 30 ml po Milk of Magnesia if there is no bowel movement in 3 days. If still no bowel movement in 5 days then give magnesium citrate 150 ml po.

Caregivers must observe or ask the resident if they are experiencing any signs and symptoms that indicate the need for PRN medication. It is not the sole responsibility of the resident to ask for PRN medications.

**For additional information on safe medication practices go to:**

<http://tinyurl.com/DHS-SafeMeds>

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