

Self-Care Toolkit:

For Community Pharmacists



Your Pharmacy = The Self-Care Hub

Everyday Prevention. Trusted Guidance. Better Health.

Community pharmacists are often the **most accessible and trusted healthcare professionals** and increasingly, becoming the place people turn first for primary health questions. Given community pharmacists' extensive knowledge and training on over-the-counter medicines, dietary supplements, and other self-care products, they are well positioned to support self-care decisions.

This toolkit focuses on two high-impact preventive self-care conversations pharmacists are positioned to lead: **Oral health routines** and **sun safety & sunscreen use**.





FOCUS AREA 1:

Oral Health =
Whole-body
Health

Why This Matters

Four in 10 adults in rural areas haven't seen a dentist in over a year, often due to access, cost, or distance¹. In fact, **57 million Americans** live in dental health professional shortage areas, many in rural communities². There is also a strong connection between oral health and overall health. Poor oral hygiene can lead to various health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory issues.

Additionally, many common medications reduce saliva or affect gum health. Dry mouth raises the risk of **cavities, gum disease, infections, and tooth loss**, especially in older adults taking multiple medications³.

This is why reinforcing daily oral care habits is critical to help patients understand the importance of a consistent routine for whole-body health.

Medications That May Require Extra Oral Care

Flag oral care importance when dispensing⁴:

- Antihistamines (e.g., diphenhydramine)
- Antidepressants and anti anxiety meds (SSRIs, TCAs, benzodiazepines)
- Blood pressure medications (calcium channel blockers, beta blockers, clonidine, diuretics)
- Bladder medications (anticholinergics like oxybutynin)
- Asthma inhalers (beta-2 agonists, anticholinergics, and corticosteroid-containing inhalers)
- Anticonvulsants (seizure medications)
- Opioids and certain pain medications (skeletal muscle relaxants)
- Immunosuppressants (cyclosporine)
- Chemotherapeutics

1. <https://carequest.org/new-report-rural-populations-have-worse-oral-health-care-access-utilization-and-outcomes-compared-to-urban-areas/>

2. <https://www.cdc.gov/oral-health/health-equity/index.html>

3. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/medications-and-treatments/oral-side-effects-of-common-medications>

4. <https://www.drugs.com/medical-answers/medications-dry-mouth-3566421/>

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FOCUS AREA 1:

Oral Health =
Whole-body
Health

Easy Conversation Starters

At pickup or counseling:

- "One thing I like to flag with this medication is it can cause dry mouth, which can affect teeth and gums over time. Daily brushing, flossing, and swishing with a mouthwash can help to keep your mouth healthy."
- "A lot of people don't realize oral health affects more than just teeth. Daily brushing, flossing, swishing with a mouthwash, and regular dental care can help support oral and overall health."

Self-Care Tips Pharmacists Can Reinforce

- Brush teeth twice a day for two minutes. Use a fluoride toothpaste.
 - Under age 3: smear/rice-sized amount
 - Ages 3–6: pea-sized amount **of fluoride toothpaste.**
- Clean between teeth at **least once a day** using floss or an interdental cleaner like a floss pick or water flosser.
- Help or supervise young children with brushing and cleaning between teeth.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3–4 months.
- Limit sugary foods and drinks.
- Wash your mouth with a swish of mouthwash **twice a day**, as directed on the Drug Facts label. There are different mouthwash options available, and you can choose the level of strength that makes it more comfortable for you to swish daily.
- See a dentist as recommended, at least twice a year, based on your oral health needs.
- "Daily oral care is an important part of preventive self-care."



Self-Care Hub Tip:

Pair oral care counseling with OTC recommendations (such as fluoride toothpaste, mouthwashes, floss) at the counter.

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FOCUS AREA 2:

Sun Safety & Sunscreen Use

Why This Matters

People in rural areas tend to spend **more time outdoors** and use sunscreen less often than urban residents⁵. Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the U.S. with **1 in 5** Americans developing skin cancer by age 70⁶.

Additionally, many medications make skin **more sensitive to sunlight**, increasing the risk of severe sunburns, rashes, and long-term skin damage, even with brief exposure⁷.

Community pharmacists can help reinforce daily sun safety habits to patients is critical for skin cancer prevention.

Medications that Require Extra Sun Protection

Flag sun safety when dispensing⁸:

- Antibiotics (doxycycline, ciprofloxacin, sulfonamides)
- NSAIDs (naproxen, piroxicam)
- Diuretics (hydrochlorothiazide, furosemide)
- Acne/retinoid medications (isotretinoin, tretinoin)
- Certain antidepressants and antipsychotics
- Methotrexate and some chemotherapy agents (fluoruracil, capecitabine, hydroxyurea)
- Amiodarone and other cardiac medications
- Sulfonylureas (glyburide, glipizide)
- Antifungals (griseofulvin, ketoconazole)

Easy Conversation Starters

At pickup or counseling:

"This medication can make your skin more sensitive to the sun, so sunscreen and protective clothing, hats and sunglasses are especially important."

"We talk a lot about sunscreen in the summer, but it's really an everyday preventive habit for everyone, regardless of skin tone."

"A lot of people are surprised that sun exposure adds up, even on cloudy days."

5. <https://aacrjournals.org/cebip/article-abstract/33/4/608/742067/Rural-Urban-Differences-in-Sun-Exposure-and?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

6. <https://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts/>

7. <https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/pharmacists-can-educate-patients-on-medication-induced-photosensitivity-sun-protection-this-summer>

8. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/medication-increasing-sun-sensitivity>

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FOCUS AREA 2:

Sun Safety & Sunscreen Use

Self-Care Tips Pharmacists Can Reinforce

- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects from both **UVA** and **UVB** rays. Use **SPF 30** or higher for incidental daily use, even on cloudy days. Use water-resistant **SPF 50** or higher for extended outdoor activities and swimming, and reapply every 2 hours to stay protected.
- Wear long sleeves, wide-brimmed hats, and UV-blocking sunglasses when possible. Choose sun-protective clothing with an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) of 50.
- Take breaks in the shade when you can, especially between the hours of 10 AM and 4 PM, when UV rays are strongest.
- Apply sunscreen daily to exposed skin, even on cloudy days.
- Reinforce that if they notice something that looks new, changing, or unusual, talk to their doctor. Early awareness is an important part of prevention.

Self-Care Hub Tip:

*Position sunscreen **near prescription pickup** during high UV season (April through August) to help prompt conversation. (Although risk still remains high all year long, and sunscreen should be worn on exposed skin every day.)*

Why This Matters

Consistent oral care and sun safety routines are simple, effective ways to take charge of your health. By building these habits into your daily life, you're protecting your body, preventing future health problems, and investing in a healthier future—for today and for years to come.

Your health starts with what you do every day.

1. <https://carequest.org/new-report-rural-populations-have-worse-oral-health-care-access-utilization-and-outcomes-compared-to-urban-areas/>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/oral-health/health-equity/index.html>
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