

✦ 25

free
guide!



Pharmacy Secrets

every chronic illness
patient should know

UNLOCK YOUR PHARMACIST'S
HIDDEN SUPERPOWERS



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✦ side effects

costs & coupons

shortages

insurance rejections ✦

Ask better. Get more.

25 questions to ask at the pharmacy counter about side effects, costs, shortages, formulations, and the stuff nobody tells you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi, I'm Ilana!



I'm a **patient advocate, author, and consultant**, and I've spent more than 15 years helping patients get heard in a healthcare system that doesn't always listen.

I'm also a rare disease patient myself, so I know firsthand that managing medications can feel like a second job, and that the pharmacist is one of the most underused experts on your care team.

Today I make content on medical gaslighting, chronic illness, disability, and women's health, and I consult with healthcare organizations, pharma companies, startups, and advocacy groups on how to earn patients' trust.

15+ years

in patient advocacy and healthcare communications

180K+

followers across Instagram & TikTok

2 books

for patients tired of being dismissed

what_i_talk_about.txt



medical gaslighting

chronic illness

disability

women's health

patient advocacy

rare disease

community trust

speaking

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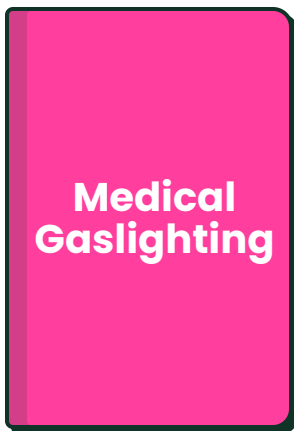
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Medical Gaslighting

How to Get the Care You Deserve in a System That Makes You Fight for Your Life

A playbook for being heard: reading your medical records, recognizing dismissive language, and pushing back with confidence.

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Surviving and Thriving with an Invisible Chronic Illness

How to Stay Sane and Live One Step Ahead of Your Symptoms

Peer-to-peer advice, humor, and practical tips for living well with an illness nobody else can see.

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WHY THIS MATTERS

Your pharmacist is a secret weapon.

When you live with complex chronic illness, medication management can become a second job. Your pharmacist is more than the person who fills your prescriptions: they can help you spot medication problems, find practical alternatives, navigate costs, and prepare better questions for your doctors.

Here are 25 ways to put that expertise to work.



WHAT'S INSIDE

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side effects, ingredients, schedules

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reviews, reactions, labs, travel

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Specialist-Level Questions

infusions, pharmacogenetics,
compounding

bonus

Find the Right Pharmacist + Checklist

who to call, and what to have ready

PART ONE

The Medication Detective



Your pharmacist can see your whole medication picture. Use them to investigate what's really going on.

Spot side effects that stack up

01

ASK:

"Could several of my medications be contributing to the same symptom, like dizziness, fatigue, constipation, or dry mouth?"

Identify a prescribing cascade

02

ASK:

"Could I be taking one medication to treat a side effect caused by another?"

Investigate inactive ingredients

03

ASK:

"Can we check the dyes, fillers, lactose, gelatin, or other inactive ingredients in this exact product?"

PART ONE · CONTINUED

The Medication Detective

04

Compare generic manufacturers

ASK:

"My symptoms changed after a refill. Did the manufacturer or formulation change?"

05

Build a safer medication schedule

ASK:

"Can you review which medications should be separated from food, supplements, or each other?"

06

Catch hidden duplicate ingredients

ASK:

"Do my prescriptions, cold medicines, pain relievers, and supplements contain overlapping ingredients?"

PART TWO

The Medication Problem-Solver

Hard to take, absorb, or find? You likely have more options than you think.



Find easier-to-take formulations

07

ASK:

"Does this come as a smaller tablet, liquid, dissolvable product, or another appropriate formulation?"

Check whether a pill can be split or crushed

08

ASK:

"Is this exact tablet safe to split or crush?"

Tip: Never assume extended-release or enteric-coated products can be altered.

Explore absorption concerns

09

ASK:

"Could delayed gastric emptying, a feeding tube, or another GI issue affect how I take or absorb this medication?"

PART TWO · CONTINUED

The Medication Problem–Solver

10

Ask about alternative delivery routes

ASK:

"Is there a patch, injection, liquid, or other delivery route worth discussing with my prescriber?"

11

Handle storage accidents

ASK:

"This medication got too hot, froze, or was left unrefrigerated. How can I confirm whether it is still usable?"

12

Navigate a shortage

ASK:

"Are other strengths, formulations, or therapeutically appropriate alternatives available for my doctor to consider?"

PART THREE

The Money-Saving Insider



The price on the screen isn't always the price you have to pay.

Compare real checkout prices

ASK:**13**

"Would insurance, a discount card, or the cash price cost less for this fill?"

Tip: Discount purchases may not count toward insurance deductibles.

Find manufacturer assistance

ASK:**14**

"Is there a copay card, patient assistance program, or other support for this medication?"

Tip: Eligibility varies; many manufacturer coupons exclude federal insurance beneficiaries.

PART THREE • CONTINUED

The Money-Saving Insider

15

Check quantity and day-supply options

ASK:

“Would a 90-day supply, mail order, or another covered quantity lower my costs?”

16

Decode an insurance rejection

ASK:

“What exactly did the claim reject for: prior authorization, step therapy, quantity limit, or something else?”

17

Find formulary-friendly alternatives

ASK:

“Is there a covered alternative I could bring to my prescriber?”

PART FOUR

The Unexpected Advocate



Pharmacists can help you prepare, document, and plan, well beyond the counter.

Call a 24-hour pharmacy after hours

ASK:

"I'm not a regular customer, but could the pharmacist answer a general medication safety question?"

18

Tip: You can call an open U.S. pharmacy outside your area; availability and the depth of advice vary. For emergencies, use emergency services or Poison Control rather than waiting on a retail pharmacy.

Request a comprehensive medication review

ASK:

"Do you offer Medication Therapy Management or a full medication review, and what should I bring?"

19

Tip: Bring prescriptions from every specialist, OTC products, supplements, allergies, and a current medication list.

PART FOUR · CONTINUED

The Unexpected Advocate

20

Document and report a suspected drug reaction

ASK:

“Could you help me assess this suspected adverse reaction and explain how to report it to FDA MedWatch?”

21

Prepare for laboratory testing

ASK:

“Could any of my medications or supplements interfere with this test or affect its interpretation?”

Tip: Do not stop medication without guidance.

PART FOUR · CONTINUED

The Unexpected Advocate

Make a travel and emergency medication plan

22

ASK:

"How should I handle time-zone changes, refrigerated medications, missed doses, or an unexpected delay in getting home?"

Understand what needs monitoring

23

ASK:

"Does this medicine usually require kidney, liver, electrolyte, blood-count, or other monitoring I should discuss with my clinician?"

PART FIVE

The Specialist-Level Questions



For complex treatments, the right pharmacist makes all the difference.

Ask about medication compatibility and special administration

ASK:**24**

“For my infusion, feeding tube, or injectable treatment, who can verify compatibility, preparation, and administration?”

Tip: A hospital, infusion, or specialty pharmacist may be the right person; never mix IV medications based on a general retail consultation.

Explore individualized medication options

ASK:**25**

“Could pharmacogenetic information, a different dose schedule, or a compounded formulation be relevant to my medication problems?”

Tip: Evidence and availability vary; the prescriber should review any treatment change.

✦ BONUS



Find the right kind of pharmacist



Community pharmacist

Everyday drug questions, interactions, OTC products, refill logistics, and costs.



Clinical pharmacist

Often works with care teams on complex regimens, medication reviews, monitoring, and treatment optimization.



Specialty pharmacist

May support biologics, injectables, complex therapies, adherence, financial assistance, and specialty medication handling.



Compounding pharmacist

Can explain whether a customized preparation is feasible and appropriate when standard formulations don't meet a specific need.



Hospital or infusion pharmacist

Best positioned for institution-specific IV compatibility, infusion protocols, and high-risk administration questions.

BEFORE YOU CALL



Your quick checklist

have_this_ready.txt



- ☐ Your complete medication list, including doses
- ☐ OTC products and supplements
- ☐ Allergies
- ☐ Medical conditions relevant to the question
- ☐ The pharmacy label or manufacturer
- ☐ The exact symptom or concern

next_step.txt



ASK FOR A CLEAR NEXT STEP

"Is this something I can manage through the pharmacy, something to discuss with my prescriber, or something that needs urgent assessment?"

know_the_limits.txt



Pharmacists can advise, identify concerns, and recommend options. Their ability to prescribe, change therapy, or order tests varies by state, credentials, and practice setting. **Do not start, stop, crush, combine, or change doses without appropriate professional guidance.**

Urgent safety

For a suspected poisoning or medication error in the U.S., call **Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222**. For severe symptoms such as trouble breathing, collapse, or a seizure, **call 911**.

Want more patient power moves?

Follow [@Ilana_Jacqueline](#) and grab my books:

Medical Gaslighting

Amazon ↗

Audible ↗

Surviving & Thriving

Amazon ↗

Audible ↗



SOURCES & FURTHER READING

- ◆ [FDA: Pharmacists Help You Use Medicines Safely](#)
- ◆ [FDA MedWatch](#)
- ◆ [APhA Foundation: Medication Therapy Management](#)
- ◆ [Poison Control](#)

This guide is for education and conversation-starting, not medical advice. Always talk with your pharmacist and prescriber about your specific situation. Photos: Unsplash.