California State Board of Pharmacy

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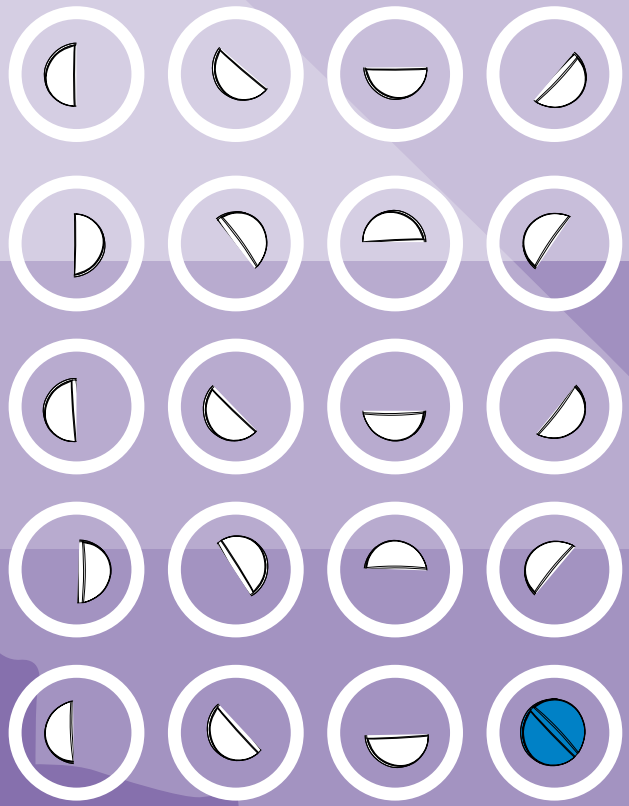
Splitting Pills

Understanding the Benefits and Risks

What is pill splitting?

Pill splitting refers to the practice of dividing a medicine tablet into two pieces. People do this for a variety of reasons:

- The size of the pill makes it too hard to swallow.
- The correct dose of a medicine is not available from the pharmacy.
- Splitting one higher strength pill into two lower strength pills can decrease the cost of the medicine–and the co-payment. For example, a 30-mg tablet may cost the same as a 15-mg tablet. If so, the patient may buy the 30-mg tablet and split it in half, getting twice as many pills for the same price.



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STATE OF CALIFORNIA
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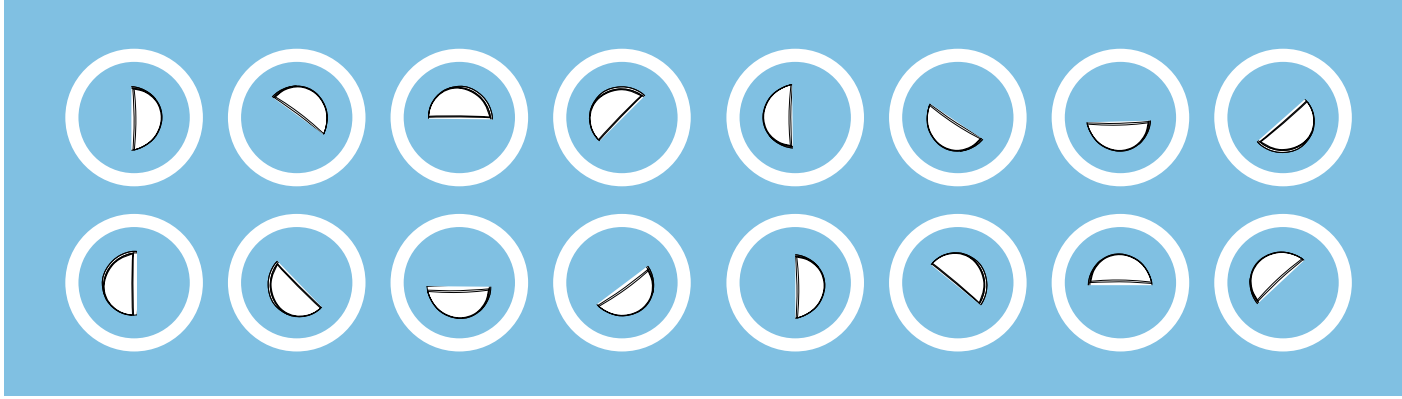
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

BE AWARE AND TAKE CARE:
Talk to your pharmacist!
CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF PHARMACY

Some pills should never be split, including:

- Pills that crumble easily.
- Pills that are specially coated (sometimes called enteric coating) to protect your stomach.
- Time-release pills that are designed to release medication over time.
- Pills with a hard coating.
- Capsules that contain powders or gels.



Why is splitting pills risky?

Splitting your pills may sound like an easy way to save money, but not all pills can be safely split. If the pill does not split equally, you may not get the right dose and the effectiveness of the medicine may be substantially reduced. Or, you may forget to split a pill and accidentally get too much medicine. Either way, the consequences can be serious.

Pills can also deteriorate and lose their effectiveness when exposed to air and moisture after being split. Never split all of your pills at once. Instead, split what you need for the first dosing and take the remaining half for the second dosing.

If you have poor eyesight or a physical ailment like arthritis or Parkinson's disease that affects your dexterity, splitting pills may be physically difficult for you. Memory problems may also suggest you are not a good candidate for pill splitting.

Safe splitting

Talk to your healthcare provider before you try splitting pills. Your physician or pharmacist can tell you if your medicines can be split. Ask before you split any medication.

If you choose to split your pills, don't use a knife. Knives can be dangerous and can cause an uneven split. Instead, purchase an inexpensive pill splitting device at your pharmacy. These typically cost between $3 and $10.

In general, the easiest pills to split are the ones that have a divided (or scored) center. Remember that not all scored pills are meant to be split. Ask your physician to include pill-splitting instructions on the medicine bottle label to avoid making a medication error.