

# 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](http://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.

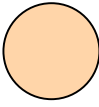









We will create a table to organize all of the information. This table includes:

- 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take 1 pill at night</li> <li>• For cholesterol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picture of one pill at night/bedtime (shown by moon)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Night/bedtime</li> </ul> 
 Furosemide 20mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take 2 pills in the morning and 2 pills in the evening</li> <li>• For fluid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picture of two pills in the morning (shown by rising sun) and two pills in the evening (shown by setting sun)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morning</li> </ul>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evening</li> </ul> 
Insulin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inject 24 units before breakfast and 12 units before dinner</li> <li>• For diabetes (sugar)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picture of syringe in the morning (shown by rising sun) and evening (shown by setting sun).</li> <li>• Picture of bag of sugar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Syringe</li> </ul>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sugar</li> </ul>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morning</li> </ul>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evening</li> </ul> 

# Creating a Personalized Pill Card

## Step 1: Start with a Blank Pill Card

Now that we have simplified the information and found all of our graphics, we can start putting together the pill card. Start with the pill card template (provided on page 9). You may copy this template and customize it to create a personalized pill card for patients, parents, or anyone else you know who has trouble keeping track of their medicines. If you are able to use a word processor, this is the easiest way to customize the pill card. However, you may also print out this template and fill in the information and drawings by hand.

### Step 1:

Name	Used For	Instructions	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Night
						






## Step 2: Enter Patient Information

Enter the name and other important information in the top row for the person who will use the pill card. If you are making a card for your mother, you might just want to put her name and her doctor's or pharmacist's phone number. If you are making cards for several patients in a clinic, you might want to include their name, address, phone number, medical record number, and the name and phone number of the clinic distributing the cards, or the doctor or pharmacist's name and phone number. **Be certain to include the date that you created or updated the card.**

## Step 3: Fill in Medicine Information

Fill in information about each medicine. Enter the name of each medicine and the amount of medicine in each pill (e.g., 20 mg) in the left hand column. Each row should have one medicine. In the second column, titled "Used For," enter the condition that the medicine is used for (e.g., cholesterol). It's OK to use non-medical words like "sugar," if that is how the medicine is known. In the third column enter simple instructions for each medicine—how much to take and when to take it. We will fill this in on Sarah's card for her medicines, simvastatin, furosemide, and insulin. You should include the brand name for each medicine in addition to the generic name.

### Steps 2-3:

Name: Sarah Smith Pharmacy phone number: 123-456-7890			Date Created: 12/15/07			
Name	Used For	Instructions	Morning 	Afternoon 	Evening 	Night 
Simvastatin 20mg	Cholesterol	Take 1 pill at night				
Furosemide 20mg	Fluid	Take 2 pills in the morning and 2 pills in the evening				
Insulin 70/30	Diabetes (Sugar) 	Inject 24 units before breakfast and 12 units before dinner				





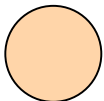
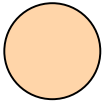

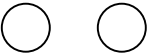
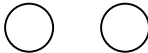




### Step 4: Add Pictures of the Medicine

Using the pill image templates on page 10, copy and paste the correct shape for each medicine into the “Name” and time of day columns as shown below. Color each shape to represent the color of the pill. For example, we used the circle shape and colored it light orange for Sarah’s simvastatin, and inserted this drawing into the “Name” and “Night” columns for simvastatin.

Make sure the number of pills in the column corresponds to the number of pills that should be taken at that time of day. For example, since Sarah takes her furosemide twice a day, two pills each time, we put two drawings of each of those pills in the “Morning” column and two in the “Evening” column.

If you are including multiple pills with similar shape or color, you can write in any markings on the pill to help distinguish one pill from another.

### Step 4:

Name: Sarah Smith Pharmacy phone number: 123-456-7890			Date Created: 12/15/07			
Name	Used For	Instructions	Morning 	Afternoon 	Evening 	Night 
 Simvastatin 20mg	Cholesterol	Take 1 pill at night				
 Furosemide 20mg	Fluid	Take 2 pills in the morning and 2 pills in the evening				
Insulin 70/30 	Diabetes (Sugar) 	Inject 24 units before breakfast and 12 units before dinner	 24 units		 12 units	

Now all of Sarah's medicines and instructions are on the card. This provides an easy reference for her to remember each of her medicines, what she takes them for, when she takes them, and how many she takes at a time.

Because the card is intended to be very simple and include only the most important information, it should be used in conjunction with the other medicine information provided by a doctor or pharmacy. For example, if Sarah wants to know the possible side effects of her simvastatin, she will need to check the information leaflet that came with her medicine.

### **Step 5: Print the Card**





Print the card on a color printer, preferably on a heavy-weight paper that will not be easily lost or damaged.

### **Using a Personalized Pill Card**

Sarah can easily see all of the important information about her medicines on her pill card. She can:

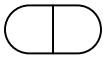



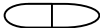





- Hang this card on her refrigerator or keep it with her medicines.
- Bring the card with her the next time she visits her doctor, in case she wants to ask a question about one of her medicines, or if she has trouble keeping them straight.
- Take the card with her if she travels somewhere, to help her keep track of her medicines while she's away from home.

# Pill Card Template



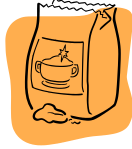



Name	Used For	Instructions	Morning 	Afternoon 	Evening 	Night 

## 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

<b>Heart</b> 	<b>Blood Pressure</b> 	<b>Diabetes/Sugar</b> 	<b>Pain</b> 
<b>Depression</b> 	<b>Sleep</b> 	<b>Asthma/Breathing</b> 