

Election '08 Who's Best for Our Future?

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Take the Tried-and-True

All things being equal, it's prudent to take older drugs whose side effects are known instead of new drugs that have less data.

"It has always been unfortunate but unavoidable that some adverse effects may not become apparent until a drug has been in wide use," says Peter J. Pitts, president of the Center for Medicine in the Pub-

lic Interest and a former associate commissioner for the FDA. Sometimes it takes years and millions of users for a pattern to emerge.

When you get a prescription for a new drug, ask your doctor why the new drug is a better choice for you than something long on the market. Also ask about any known serious side effects. And read any printouts

from the pharmacy before you take a new medication.

Speak up. Trust your instincts. If you experience any new physical or mental symptoms, consult your pharmacist or physician as soon as possible. Report any adverse side effects to the FDA (www.fda.gov/medwatch or 800-332-1088) and the pharmaceutical manufacturer.

any better than we do. "How to go off medicines isn't routinely studied and remains more of an art than a science," says Jack E. Fincham, PhD, a pharmacy professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Pharmacy. Here are some common reasons for stopping a medicine and what you should know before you do.

"I was feeling fine"

Seven-year-old Nicolas Gerlock's strep throat was being treated with ten days of antibiotics. But after eight days, the boy's fever and soreness were gone, and he was talking at taking more medicine. "I shouldn't have given in," says his mother, Jennifer Gerlock of Frederick, Maryland. She shelved the medicine, but a few days later, Nick's voice was raspy, and the

fever spiked again. Eight days after Nick started a second round of antibiotics, Gerlock figured the bug had to be dead, and her little complaint wasn't making things easy. So she stopped the medication early again, and the infection resurged. "We're on our third round of antibiotics, a we are finishing this one," she says

BOTTOMLINE Feeling better does not mean that all the bacteria have been killed or that an infection has been eradicated. Partially treated strep can affect the heart and kidneys for instance. Stopping too soon may also contribute to the rising problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

People with chronic conditions like high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes often stop taking pills because they feel no symptoms to begin with. Always ask your doctor how long you need to take a prescribed medication