

Here's Why Your Pharmacist Won't Fill Your Prescription — and What You Can Do About It



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Have you ever taken a prescription to the pharmacy counter only to find out that your pharmacist won't fill it? This scenario happens more often than you might think. From illegible handwriting to a pharmacist's moral beliefs, you may find yourself having to jump through some hoops to get your prescription filled.

Here are seven reasons why your pharmacist can refuse to fill your prescription and steps you can take in each situation.

1) The prescription is missing information

Pharmacies receive prescriptions in a couple of different ways: They can be physically dropped off, called in over phone, faxed, or electronically sent in. With prescriptions flying out of doctors' offices, in some instances, they can get to pharmacies missing crucial information.

In order to fill your prescription, the pharmacy must have all of the necessary information to do so—like the strength of the medication, quantity, directions for use, prescription date, patient name, and the doctor's signature. If something is missing, your pharmacist is required by law to contact your doctor's office before dispensing any medication to you.

What can you do?

If your doctor writes a prescription and gives it to you during your appointment (which is becoming rarer these days), give it a quick look to ensure that it is complete. You don't have to be a doctor or pharmacist to tell if any information is missing. If you notice that that's the case, make sure to let the doctor know before leaving your

appointment to avoid running into issues at the pharmacy.

2) The prescription is hard to read

We've all seen terrible handwriting before, and doctors are notorious for it. If the pharmacist is unable to read a prescription, they are required by law to contact your doctors office and confirm the information first. Handwritten prescriptions are not as common these days due to the popularity of electronic prescriptions, but they still do exist and need to be deciphered by the pharmacist.

What can you do?

If you notice that that your prescription looks sloppy, be sure to leave your contact information with the pharmacy in case there are any problems. The pharmacy staff would prefer alerting you to any potential issues, rather than having you come back to the pharmacy to find out your prescription isn't ready.

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3) The pharmacist doesn't feel comfortable filling the prescription

There are many reasons, including ethical and religious beliefs, for why a pharmacist may not feel comfortable filling a prescription. We saw this recently when [a pharmacist refused to fill](#) a prescription for [misoprostol](#), a medication used to end a pregnancy.

What can you do?

A pharmacist is technically allowed to decline filling your prescription based on their moral beliefs. If that happens, try seeing if there's another pharmacist working at the pharmacy and speak with them. You can also try transferring your prescription to another pharmacy to be filled, although this can add some inconvenience.

4) The medication needs to be ordered

Most people expect a pharmacy to have their specific medication in stock—after all, it is a pharmacy, right? Wrong. Unfortunately, pharmacies don't keep every medication in stock (especially rare or expensive medications) and may need to order your medication before they can fill it.

What can you do?

If you want to make sure the pharmacy has your medication on hand, call them ahead of time to check. Most pharmacies can order an out-of-stock medication and have it ready for you the following day. If you can't wait a full day, check with other pharmacies in your area to see if they have your prescription in stock.

5) The prescription appears to be altered

Pharmacists must make sure that patients have a valid prescription, so they may question prescriptions that seem to be damaged or altered in some way. Was it taped back together? Is information scratched out? Additionally, if any information on the prescription concerning the date, strength, or quantity appears to be altered, your pharmacist may not fill your medication.

Alterations on a prescription, even if they are from the doctor, can make the pharmacist second guess its validity and prompt them to verify its details with your doctor—which is usually not a fast process.

What can you do?

If you give your prescription a once over and notice the doctor scratched something out or messed up when writing the prescription, kindly see if they would start over and write you a new prescription. Doing this will prevent the pharmacy from questioning the prescription, and save you time at the pharmacy.

6) The insurance billing system is down

While it's rare, insurance companies can have outages where pharmacies may be unable to submit your prescription claim. Unfortunately, this problem cannot be solved by going to a different pharmacy due to it being a problem on the insurance end.

When an insurance billing system is down, it doesn't necessarily mean you can't get your prescription, but it might mean that you can't count on your insurance to pay your bill right away.

What can you do?

If you need your prescription right away, you can still pay the pharmacy's cash price for the medication (the price of the medication if you didn't have any insurance) and get your prescription ASAP. Once your insurance billing website is up and running, talk with your pharmacist about re-billing your prescription.

If you choose to leave your prescription at the pharmacy and wait for the insurance billing system to be fully functioning again, I would suggest leaving your contact information and asking the pharmacy to give you a call when your prescription has been properly billed and is ready for pick-up.

7) The new medication could cause a dangerous interaction

As a patient, you can rely on your pharmacist or healthcare provider to let you know if medications you take have any unsafe interactions. Not only do certain prescription medications interact dangerously with one another, but they can also interact with over-the-counter medications, vitamin and mineral supplements, or even certain foods. Therefore, be sure to disclose everything you are taking, even dietary supplements, to your pharmacist.

If your pharmacist tells you they need to talk to the doctor before filling your prescription to discuss a potential interaction, it's probably important. Just because one of your doctors prescribes you a medication, it doesn't mean that they are aware of all the other medications you take from other doctors you see.

What can you do?

Make sure you keep a list of all of your current prescription and over-the-counter medications. Share this list with each of your healthcare providers so they have your most up-to-date medical information.

If you need your medication urgently and your pharmacy is waiting on a return call from your doctor's office to verify the safety of your medication, feel free to reach out to your doctor as well. However, it's important to keep in mind that your pharmacy is at the mercy of your doctor's office, as some doctors don't return calls until the end of the day or later.

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