If I mistakenly skip a dose of my medication, can I make up for it later?

It is easy to forget to take single doses of a treatment regimen. This is especially true if our daily routines change (for example, while on a trip, at meetings, or other special activities). One reason can be that we forget to bring our medications.

**What are the consequences?**
A skipped dose could mean that the blood level of the medication drops and its benefit diminishes. This may be less of an issue for long-term preventive treatments with blood pressure or cholesterol-lowering medications. For other conditions with narrow therapeutic windows, fluctuations of blood concentrations could be critical. This could apply to treatments of epilepsy for control of seizures, lithium-containing medications for the manic-depressive syndrome, medications to avoid organ rejection following transplantation, and treatment of HIV.

Other special conditions include the use of oral contraceptives and the blood-thinner warfarin. If a woman forgets her oral contraceptive for more than 24 hours, the protection against pregnancy may be lost. For the rest of that menstrual cycle, she may consider using other preventive measures. The blood thinning with warfarin can be very difficult to keep constant, and requires close monitoring and dose adjustments. A dose that is too high may cause bleeding, and a low dose may not prevent clot formation. If more than a single dose is forgotten, you should contact your physician.

**What should I do?**
If you are on a once-a-day regimen and you discover late in a day that you forgot the morning dose, you may take the missed dose and resume the morning dose the next day. If you are on a twice- or three-times-a-day regimen and you discover when you are about to take the second or third dose that you skipped the previous one, take that dose and do not double it. If you are on a once-a-day regimen and discover one morning that you forgot the previous day’s dose, don’t make up for it.

As a basic rule, you should resume your regular schedule and not make up for the forgotten dose.
- I skipped my drink yesterday. Should I have two glasses today?
Key messages

✔️ A missed dose may reduce the blood level of your medication and the benefit may diminish.
✔️ For most indications, a single missed dose will have no medical consequences.
✔️ For special conditions, missed doses can be of critical importance.
✔️ Special rules apply to skipped doses of contraceptive pills.
✔️ The basic rule: Resume your regular schedule and don’t try to make up for a forgotten dose.