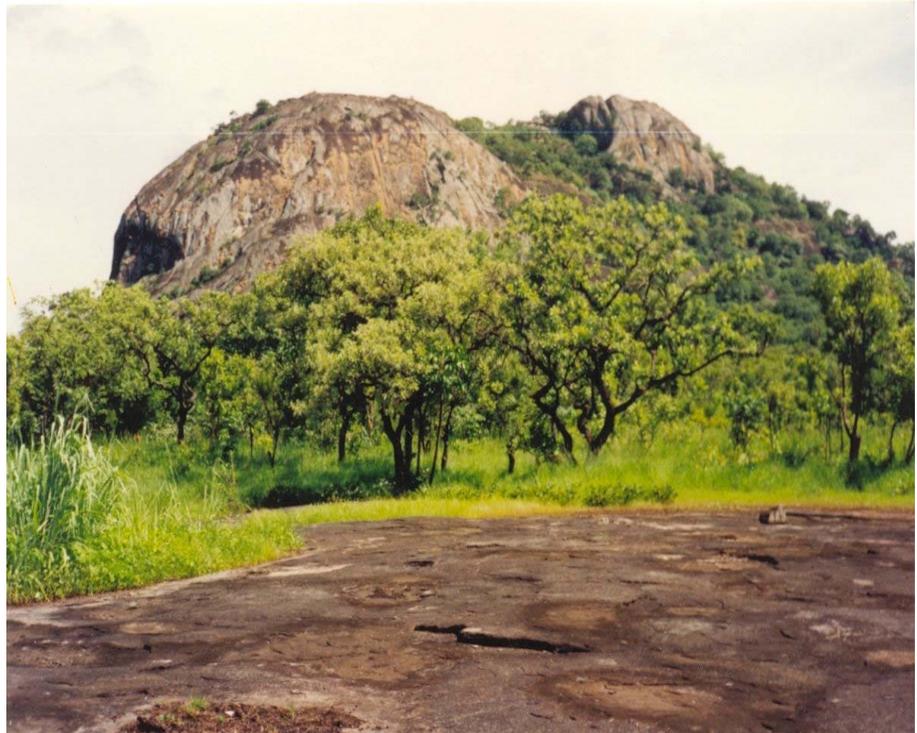


Wotogo Thunder

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HEALTH TIP: KNOW YOUR PRESCRIPTION



A prescription for a medication spells out or should spell out the following:

1. **Name:** Each medicine has at least two names: a brand name and a generic one. You need to know at least one of them. It is neither enough nor wise to say it is a little purple or blue pill. If I say, for example, that I drive a little blue car, you have no idea whether this car is a Ford Focus, Saturn, Honda or Nissan Altima. The same thing applies here.
2. **Dosage:** This is the amount of medicine, usually given in milligrams, in each tablet, capsule, teaspoon or milliliter. An abbreviated language sometimes including Latin symbols then states how much of the medicine (in tablets, teaspoons etc.), how often and for how long it should be taken. It is important to note that some medicines are to be taken before, with or after meals.
3. **Route:** This is the path through which the medicine enters the body: by mouth, under the tongue, injection, inhalation or other (yes, there are other ways).
4. **Number of pills:** This number is determined by the duration of treatment. One must have a sufficient amount of medication for a full course of treatment.

With a few exceptions, the prescription does not reveal the condition that is being treated, the side effects or drug interactions that the medicine may cause. It is up to you to ask your doctor about what you should watch out for. You can also find a copy of the Physicians' Desk Reference (PDR) at a local library or at Barnes and Noble and look up that information for free. It is your body; know what you are putting into it.

By Martin L. Mikaya, MD

TOP 5 AUTO-REPAIR SCAMS

1. Spit-Shine Fixes

Here's the scam: The mechanic will tell you something in your car needs to be replaced, like the starter motor. But rather than replace that perfectly fine-functioning device, the mechanic simply removes it, gives it a good cleaning so it looks like new, and puts it back in your car. Parts singled out for the spit-shine trick are those that are easily removed, says Jack Nerad, executive editorial director of [Kelley Blue Book](#). Batteries, for example, are prime targets, as are oil filters and radiators. Some shops won't bother to do anything at all -- instead telling you they replaced the part with one that was refurbished (and so, unlikely to appear shiny and new).

Your fix: Have your mechanic point out the part in question to be replaced. "Mark it in some way," suggests Nerad, while the mechanic isn't looking. If that seems pretty much impossible, take the car home before agreeing to the work. Try a dot of Wite-Out correction fluid or a swipe of chalk. Then, post-repair, ask to see the old part and the shop's purchase order for its replacement. You'll know your old part by its identifying mark, and the new one from the dated receipt.



2. Accelerated Maintenance

When it comes to regularly scheduled maintenance, your vehicle manufacturer and your mechanic agree on just one thing -- your car will need some work at some point. But their opinions on just what should be done and when are vastly different, says Karl Brauer, editor in chief of Edmunds.com. "The dealership's list will be two, three, four times as long," he says. "There's a lot of profit to be made in doing things that don't need to be done."

Take a 2005 Honda Accord, for example. After one year or 10,000 miles, Honda recommends rotating the tires and replacing the engine oil. In comparison, Majestic Honda dealership in Lincoln, R.I., recommends 17 points of inspection and repair after just 7,500 miles, from testing window wipers to lubricating door hinges.

Your fix: "The manufacturer knows best," says Brauer, so follow its suggested maintenance schedule. Instead of asking for a shop's 10,000-mile service package, pull out your owner's manual and point out exactly what you'd like done. Forget about the alternate schedule for heavy-use vehicles, he adds. Though your mechanic may try to convince you otherwise, most drivers just don't fall into that category, which is for drivers who drive off-road most of the time, or in temperatures below 10 degrees or in excess of 90 degrees. (Check your owner's manual for details.)

TOP 5 AUTO-REPAIR SCAMS

3. Guessing Games

Stalling car? It could be your fuel injectors. No, maybe it's your fuel pump. Beware so-called parts-replacers -- mechanics who can't figure out the problem but are happy to keep retooling your car, says Anthony Giorgianni, an associate editor with Consumer Reports. "He's guessing -- and he's charging you for his guesswork." Most parts-replacers just don't have the knowledge to properly diagnose car troubles, says Giorgianni, but some are purposely lax, banking on the idea that you'll keep coming in to get more work done.

Your fix: Ask your mechanic to make good on their initial goof, in the form of a refund or a discount on their next repair attempt, Giorgianni suggests. "You paid for something that was not the problem," he says, "and a good mechanic will give you credit for that work already done." But if your car troubles persist after a second repair attempt, it's time to find a new mechanic. "That one is not skilled enough to be working on your car."

4. Stupid Customer Tricks

Unscrupulous mechanics love to cash in on consumers' lack of knowledge about their own vehicles, says Brauer of Edmunds.com. A common trick involves your motor oil. "They hold the dipstick so it doesn't go all the way down," he says. Surprise, surprise -- you're short on oil. That's just a \$5 to \$10 "fix," but other tricks can be far more expensive. One detached spark plug simulates engine trouble very nicely (leading into a parts-replacer or a spit-shine fix).

Your fix: Such minor cons are impossible to pull if you have some basic knowledge of your own vehicle, says Michael Calkins, manager of approved auto repair for AAA. Consumers who know, for example, that no manufacturer recommends a power steering flush won't be conned into buying one at their local oil change shop. And if you can check your own oil, you'll never be fooled by the dipstick trick. Look to a basic auto repair book or even your vehicle owner's manual.

5. One Job, Twice the Labor

It's not uncommon: Your mechanic delves under the hood to make one repair, and in the process spots another part in need of fixing. Unfortunately, it's equally common to be charged as if the mechanic was taking apart your car twice -- rather than just the once to access both problems, says Julie Sussman, co-author of "Dare to Repair Your Car." To get to a damaged water pump, she says, your mechanic would remove several belts. Should he notice a problem with a belt, he's not going to do twice the work (i.e., stick the belt back in the car and then remove it later for repair). "Why should you pay for twice the labor?" asks Sussman. "He was going to take the parts off anyway."

Your fix: When new problems show up midrepair, ask specifically about additional labor before giving your OK, says Sussman. Then check the final bill to ensure there's no overlap.



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