

MEDICATION & SAFETY

Medication is usually considered safe if certain guidelines are followed. These include:

- Individual prescribing or recommending the medication is properly trained and licensed.
- Medical personnel are made aware of the present medical condition & history, allergies, diet and of any other medication, vitamins or herbals being taken by the person to whom the medication will be administered.
- Medical personnel make proper diagnosis of the person's illness: Doctors (Prescription drugs) and Pharmacist (Over-the-Counter medicines).
- Medical personnel administer or dispense proper dosage.
- Medication is properly labelled or package insert made available to the person taking the medication. Make special note of the expiry date, active ingredients, drug interaction indications, precautions and contraindications or side effects.
- Patient reads and complies with label instructions, re usage and storage as well as the doctor's instructions re dosage.
- Medication is properly stored and kept out of reach of those who ought not to take it, which includes children, the elderly and other relatives who may have a similar condition.
- Medication that has finished or expired is disposed of properly.

NOTE: In Jamaica, medicines have to be registered with the Ministry of Health and formal approval given for them to be imported and distributed in the country.

MEDICATION HAZARDS & THE CONSUMER'S ROLE



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Be an informed consumer!

Unfortunately, medication errors happen. They happen in hospitals, in pharmacies, or even at home. And sometimes people get hurt because of these errors.

The more information you have, the better able you are to prevent errors and to take care of yourself. You have to ask your pharmacists, doctors and nurses about your medications, and you have to expect answers.

Also, if you have any chronic illnesses, pick up one of the consumer guides about medications at a bookstore or from the library. Find out all that you can about your illnesses and the medications you are taking. What you learn will help protect you later.

When purchasing Over-the-Counter medicines (OTCs), you are taking responsibility for your own healthcare, medicating yourself for minor ailments like colds, headaches, and stomachaches. Take the labels on these products seriously. Read the labels each time you take the medication, as they sometimes change, for example, the per-pill dosage may be higher. Read the labels and ask your pharmacist for assistance when you are not sure. Make informed healthcare decisions for you and your family.

Your doctors, nurses and pharmacists work hard to keep you healthy, but you are also responsible. Learn what questions to ask. Expect answers—it's your life and your health!

Causes of Medication Hazards:

- *Improper Administration* – Wrong medication for condition
- *Dosing Errors* – Wrong dosage taken of drug
- *Incorrect Usage* – Medication not used for prescribed purpose
- *Drug Interaction* – Medication reacts with other ingested component and causes an undesired reaction
- *Improper Storage & Disposal* – Medication made accessible to high-risk groups such as small children and the elderly



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE ERRORS

Ask Questions

Your pharmacist can be your partner to prevent medication errors. Find one who offers services like monitoring your therapy and keeping a complete list in the pharmacy computer of all your medications and chronic medical conditions. Include over-the-counter medications, vitamins, nutritional supplements and herbal products even if you bought them somewhere else. It's worth the cost. With this information in one place, your pharmacist can help to protect you against harmful drug interactions, duplicate medications and other potential problems. Before you leave the pharmacy, your pharmacist should give you printed information about the medication and make sure that you understand the answers to these questions:

1. What are the brand and generic names of the medications?
2. What does it look like?
3. Why am I taking it?
4. How much should I take, and how often?
5. When is the best time to take it?
6. How long will I need to take it?
7. What side effects should I expect, and what should I do if they happen?
8. What should I do if I miss a dose?
9. Does this interact with my other medications or any foods?
10. Does this replace anything else I was taking?
11. Where and how do I store it?

Pharmacists are obligated to counsel their customers. Avoid pharmacies that do not allow you to interface with the Pharmacist. It is your responsibility to demand quality service and answers, which if answered correctly, will help you avoid many of the hazards associated with medication. Below are other measures you can take to reduce medication hazards.



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1. *Improper Administration*

- Ensure that you consult a qualified health practitioner who is licensed to administer or recommend medication to you. Avoid street vendors who sell medication illegally.*
- Understand and follow your doctor or pharmacist's directions for taking the medicine.*
- Do not take medication simply on the recommendation of a friend or relative who had your symptoms or illness. Take only medication prescribed or recommended to you by a doctor or pharmacist.*
- Ensure that you discuss with your doctor or pharmacist, all the symptoms you experience due to your condition, your medical history, including allergies. This will aid in them making a proper diagnosis and therefore administer the most effective and safe medicine.*
- Make a list of medications you are taking now. Include the dose, how often you take them, the imprint on each tablet or capsule, and the name of the pharmacy. The imprint can help you identify a drug when you get refills.*
- Any time that your medications changes, change your list, too. Double-check the imprints on the tablets and capsules.*
- Always check medication administered to ensure you got the correct drug. Some drugs have the same brand name or similar names but different ingredients, and therefore, different effects.*
- Some drugs have the same active ingredient, but include other components to treat different conditions. Seek advice and do not substitute one for another before consulting a health practitioner.*
- When you buy over-the-counter medications, read the labels carefully because they might contain ingredients you do not want or should not take. Maybe they will interact with your other medications, cause an allergic reaction, or not be correct for your symptoms. Consult your pharmacist before purchasing OTCs, especially if you're already on a prescription, or if you need help selecting the correct and most effective drug.*



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...in the hospital:

- Take your medications and the list of your medications with you when you go to the hospital. Your doctors and nurses will need to know what you are taking.
- After your doctor has seen them, send your medications home with your family. While you are in the hospital you may not need the same medications.
- Tell your doctor you want to know the names of each medication and the reasons you are taking them. That way, if anyone tells you anything different, you'll know to ask questions, which might prevent errors.
- Look at all medicines before you take them. If it doesn't look like what you usually take, ask why. It might be a generic drug, or it might be the wrong drug. Ask the same questions you would ask if you were in the pharmacy.
- Do not let anyone give you medications without checking your hospital ID bracelet every time. This helps prevent you from getting someone else's medications.
- Before any test or procedure, ask if it will require any dyes or medicines. Remind your nurse and doctor if you have allergies.
- When you're ready to go home, have the doctor, nurse or pharmacist go over each medication . . . with you and a family member. Update your medication list from home if any prescriptions change or if new medications are added.

...at the doctor's office:

- Take your medication list every time you go to your doctor's office, especially if you see more than one doctor. They might not know about the medications other doctors prescribed for you.
- Ask your doctor to explain what is written on any prescription, including the drug name and how often you should take it. Then when you take the prescription to the pharmacy, you can double-check the information on the label.



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- Tell your doctor you want the purpose for the medication written on the prescription. Many drug names look alike when written poorly; knowing the purpose helps you and the pharmacist double-check the prescription.
- If your doctor gives you samples, make sure that he or she checks to be sure that there are no interactions with your other medications. Pharmacies have computers to check for drug interactions and allergies, but when your doctor gives you samples, this important check may be missed

II. Dosing Errors

- Read the label every time you take a dose to make sure you have the right drug and that you are following the instructions.
- Comply with the instructions on the label, especially those of your doctor:
 - * Do not substitute teaspoons with tablespoons.
 - * Do not chew when instructed to swallow
 - * Do not dilute liquid medication, cut, crush tablets or open capsules, unless instructed by doctor. *(This may affect the drug's dosage & effectiveness or may cause damage to the stomach)*
 - * Take medication at the times indicated, with or without meals, as per the doctor's orders.
- Take special care when administering medication to children. Some children's medication requires dilution or a specific mixture or dosage, based on their age and weight.
- If your child throws up or spills some medicine, do not give your child extra medicine. This could cause an overdose. Instead call your doctor or pharmacist.
- Some drugs have the same active ingredient though they treat different conditions. Read the labels to ensure you are not getting an overdose. The duplication can easily go unnoticed by your doctor.
- Do not discontinue use of medication, unless instructed by your doctor.
- Do not break the dosage, and then restart it at a later date.
- Use dose cups sent with medication. Those that come with nonprescription drugs are unique to those products, in terms of size and markings (doses).



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- Learn the names of the drugs that are prescribed and given to you, as well as their dosage strength and schedules.
- All reactions to the medication experience, outside of those outlined by package insert or medical personnel should be reported promptly, and the medication discontinued, if violent reactions persist.

III. *Incorrect Usage*

- Be careful not to confuse drops for the eyes and ears.
- Suppositories ought to be inserted and not swallowed. Ensure that the outer wrapping is removed before insertion.
- Be careful to remove cap from syringes used to administer liquid medication. Failure do so may lead to choking in small children. Ensure that they are also properly disposed.

IV. *Drug Interaction*

- Medication reacts with the food, beverages, vitamins, herbals and other medication. Make ure to discuss these with your doctor or pharmacist before you are administered any prescription of over-the-counter medication.

V. *Improper Storage & Disposal*

- Don't store medications in the bathroom medicine cabinet or in direct sunlight. Humidity, heat and light can affect medications' potency and safety
- Keep all drugs in their original child-resistant containers, and store them away safely, preferably in a locked cabinet.
- The label has specific conditions under which certain products ought to be stored. Ensure that these are followed.



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- Don't keep tubes of ointments or creams next to your tube of toothpaste. They feel a lot alike when you grab quickly, but a mistake could be serious.
- Ensure that medication for pets are stored separately from human medication.
- Flush any old medications, including used patches, down the toilet. Children and pets might get into medications that are thrown into the wastebasket, and some drugs actually become toxic after the expiration date.

Poisoning & Poison Prevention Tips

Children, mostly under age five, remain the most frequent poisoned victims. The aged are the second most commonly affected group. Failing eyesight, the use of multiple drugs, and confusion or difficulty in remembering whether a medication was taken are among the causes of accidental poisoning in older people. Approximately 9 of 10 accidental poisonings occur in the home. Here are some safety tips that every parent, caregiver should note:

- Be aware that iron intake in large amounts could cause poisoning. Vitamins and minerals with iron must be kept out of the reach and sight of children and in child-resistant containers (CRCs).
- Toothpaste with fluoride can become harmful to children (may cause stomach upsets) if taken in large amounts (mouthfuls). Discourage children from eating toothpaste, especially those great tasting flavours.
- Know what you are putting in your mouth. Do not intake anything until you are sure what it is. If you don't know for sure what's in a prescription bottle, medicine cup, or drinking cup, don't swallow it.
- Ensure that all chemicals and medication is properly labelled.
- Keep all medications (both prescription and nonprescription) in their original child-resistant containers and out of others reach, preferably, locked cabinets.
- Never store or keep any type of medication in the bedrooms.



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- Always read the labels and follow the instructions exactly.
- Always turn the light on when giving or taking medicine.
- Children imitate adults, so avoid taking medications in their presence.
- Never take or give your child someone else's medicine.
- Avoid calling medicine "candy."
- If you care for an older person, watch for confusion, especially with medications.
- Check your medications periodically for expiration dates. If medication is not dated, consider it expired six months after purchase.
- Many adult medicines can be deadly to small children and pets and must be disposed of properly and safely. Avoid putting medications in open trash containers in the kitchen or bathroom. Also, do not throw medicines into the toilet.
- If your child intakes anything potentially harmful, or you suspect they have, don't wait for the person to get sick. Stay calm, and call the Poison Control Center IMMEDIATELY!
- Keep the number of the Poison Control Center where your other emergency numbers are placed: in a safe accessible place.

HANDLING POISONING EMERGENCIES

Proper management of poisoning requires expert guidance. The local Poison Control Center and/or your family doctor are very important resources in handling poisoning emergencies. Affix these numbers to all telephones or post it in a conspicuous place, such as a bulletin board next to a telephone. All family members as well as baby-sitters should know when and how to call this number.

When calling the Poison Control Center:



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- Be prepared to give as much information as possible. The person answering the phone will want to know your name, location, and telephone number so he can call back in case you are disconnected, or can summon help if needed.
- Give the name of the substance ingested and, if possible, the amount and time of ingestion. If the bottle or package is available, give the trade name and ingredients if they are listed.
- Describe the state of the poisoning victim. Is the victim conscious? Are there any symptoms? What is the person's general appearance, skin color, respiration, breathing difficulties, mental state (alert, sleepy, unusual behavior)? Vomiting? Convulsions?

Using this information, the poison center specialist can give specific first-aid instructions. The majority of the cases called into poison control centers can be handled at home if instructions are followed promptly and correctly.

First aid for a poisoning emergency follows the same general guidelines applicable for any injury:

- Check first for vital signs—breathing and pulse—and, if they are absent, call 119, then perform CPR.
- If there are obvious symptoms of serious poisoning, call 119 or an ambulance service.
- If the person is conscious, call the Poison Control Center and follow whatever instructions are given.
- If you are unable to reach a Poison Control Center or a local hospital emergency department for advice, transport the victim to the nearest emergency service.
- If you are far from medical assistance (greater than 30 minutes), the following general guidelines should be applied in the absence of specific instructions from a poison control center or other reliable source:
- Determine the nature of the ingested substance. If there are no visible bottles or other clues, examine the mouth for signs of burns, which would indicate an acid or alkali. Smell the breath for a petroleum-like odor.



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- ❑ Diluting the poison by administering water or milk is advised for most substances. Water is recommended for acid and alkali ingestion if the person can swallow.
- ❑ If the substance that has been swallowed is a medication, poisonous plant, pesticide, or other product with significant systemic toxicity and has been ingested within the previous hour, induce vomiting. Give 1 or 2 tablespoons of ipecac syrup (see label instructions for dose) followed by 1/2 glass to 2 glasses of water. If the first dose does not induce vomiting, this may be repeated in 20 minutes. Vomiting can also be induced by inserting a spoon or finger at the back of the throat to produce a gag reflex. Collect a specimen of the vomit for analysis by medical personnel.

Do not induce vomiting if:

1. The nature of the substance is unknown.
2. A corrosive substance (house cleaner, lye, bleach, or other acid or alkali product) is suspected.
3. A petroleum product (benzene, kerosene, gasoline, turpentine, paint thinner, other hydrocarbon) is suspected. Vomiting a petroleum product carries the danger of inhaling it into the lungs, causing chemical pneumonia.
4. The person is having seizures, is unconscious or appears to be losing consciousness.
5. The victim is less than 1 year of age.

Take the poisoning victim, along with the bottle or container of whatever was ingested, and any vomit to the nearest hospital emergency department for further treatment.

POTENTIALLY HARMFUL SUBSTANCES COMMONLY FOUND ABOUT THE HOUSE

Acetaminophen	Drain cleaner	Iodine
Ammonia	Fabric softener	Ionic detergents
Aspirin	Floor wax	Laxatives
Bleach	Furniture polish	Lighter fluid
Carpet cleaner	Hairspray	Liquor
Cement and glue	Hair straighteners	Metal polish
Contraceptive pills	Headache remedies	Nail varnish



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Deodorants	Heart medicines	Oven cleaner
Depilatories	Houseplants	Paint
Diet pills	Ibuprofen	Paint thinner
Diuretics	Insecticides	Perfume

Permanent-wave solutions
Rat poison
Room deodorizer
Rubbing alcohol
Shampoo
Shoe polish
Sleeping pills/sleep aids
Tranquilizers
Turpentine
Vitamins
Window cleaning fluid

HERBAL ALERT

A CAUTION ON HERBS AND HERB MEDICINE:

Herbs are mankind's oldest remedies, and many are still used as the basis for modern medicine. But many herbs are also deadly; others are not particularly harmful, but neither do they possess any great healing or curative powers. A medicinal herb should be treated like any medication: Do not take it unless you are completely familiar with its effects or you have checked with your doctor. Be wary of herbalists and home herbal remedies and never try brewing your own. Many plants look alike, and a deadly poison can easily be mistaken for one that is harmless. For example, one bite of water hemlock, which looks very much like parsley, chervil, or coriander (all harmless), can be fatal.

Herbs may become toxic or harmful; depending on which country and under what climatic or weather conditions they are grown. Another factor is whether fertilizers are used in its cultivation. Given this lack of uniformity, it is difficult to give a universal dosage of how much of an herb one can safely ingest. Persons would therefore be advised to contact the local Poison Control Center and inquire whether scientific analysis had been done on that plant and whether it is safe, the method of preparation and the suggested dosage.



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Note that some traditionally used herbs in Jamaica, that is, Cerasy, Busy and Comprey, have been recently tested and found to be harmful, if taken in large amounts.

Cerasy has been traditionally known to lower blood sugar. Recent tests however have shown where it can actually increase blood sugar levels.

Busy, traditionally used as an antidote for poison, can itself lead to poisoning, if large amounts are ingested.

Comprey, another popular herb used in Jamaica, has been used for many ailments, including asthma. Based on recent tests however, comprey ought not to be ingested, as it can cause serious damage to the liver. When used externally however, the toxins are not absorbed as much.

The traditional method of preparing herbs has been to boil them. This however is harmful, as those, generally considered as safe may become harmful, as through boiling, the toxins and poisons are released. The recommended method is to pour boiling water over the herb, therefore extracting the safe components without extracting the toxins.

As a wise and vigilant consumer, it is your responsibility to keep yourself and your family safe. Use the resources available to you, via health magazines, the public library and the Internet Contact resource centers such as the Poison Control Center. Find out as much as possible about the medication you take and the herbs you ingest. Know what effect they will have on you, before you put them in your body.

HERE'S TO YOUR HEALTH!