

OCTOBER: Talk About Prescriptions

In 1989, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) coined the phrase, "America's *Other* Drug Problem". In 1997, NCPPIE produced a documentary, "The Other Drug Problem", referring to prescription drug misuse.

DID YOU KNOW...?

- The volume of retail prescriptions is projected to reach 4.5 billion prescriptions by 2010 in the USA
- Through 2010, the fastest-growing age group will be those 45-64 years of age; after 2010, those aged 65 and older will be the fastest growing age cohort
- The elderly (age 65 and older) make up 13% of the US population, but account for 34% of all prescription medicines dispensed, and for 42% of all retail prescription dollars spent
- In a study published in 2000, 40% of cancer patients took unconventional medical therapies but didn't tell their doctors unless specifically asked
- Researchers found a 76% discrepancy rate between what medicines patients were prescribed and what they actually took! 51% took medicines not reported to their doctor; 29% didn't take medicines they told the doctor they were taking; and 29% were taking different doses than prescribed (too much or too little)
- Adverse drug reactions ("ADRs") may be the 5th or 6th leading cause of death in the USA
- A *Prevention* magazine survey concluded that 106 million people use vitamins and minerals daily; 44.6 million use herbal remedies; 24.2 million use specialty supplements; yet, the majority have not told their doctors about them
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not evaluated the safety or risk/benefits of many supplements (many consumers believe these supplements to be so safe that FDA testing is not necessary; still, almost one-fourth of those suing such products have experienced a side effect or adverse reaction)

WHAT CAN I DO TO BE "MED-WISE"?

There are more than 100,000 OTC drugs that you can buy without a prescription, and they all have one thing in common: they are serious medicines that need to be taken with care. Here are ten tips for safe use of your medications... let's focus on the OTC's first...

- **Always start by reading the label... ALL of it!** It will help you decide if you have selected the right product for your symptoms, understand the dosing instructions and become aware of any warnings that apply to you

- **Look for a medicine that will treat only the symptoms you have** - formulas for OTC meds are very specific and should not be mixed and matched
- **Know what to avoid while taking the medication:** like prescription medicines, some OTC drugs can cause side effects or reactions – read the label to see what you must avoid while taking the drug
- **When in doubt, ask before you buy or use it!** Taking an OTC med safely is too important for guesswork... ask your doctor or pharmacist
- **Take the medicine EXACTLY as stated on the label.** More is not better, so take the recommended amount and at the exact intervals as stated on the label
- **Use extra caution when taking more than one drug.** Many meds contain the same active ingredients, which means you may be getting more than a safe dose.



- **Don't combine prescription meds and OTC drugs without talking to your doctor or pharmacist.** It may increase your risk of a deadly reaction!
- **Make sure that each of your doctors has a complete list of the drugs you're taking,** both prescription and OTC.
- **Always give infants and children OTC meds that are specially formulated for their age and weight.**
- **Do NOT use OTC (or prescription) medicines after their expiration dates!** Dispose of all meds promptly after their expiration: don't throw them away where children or pets may find them, or discard them in a toilet where they may end up in our water supply or soil; instead, crush pills or empty capsules, mixing them with another substance (e.g., old coffee grounds) that you're disposing of; then, place them in a container such as a zip-lock plastic bag and toss them into household trash; or contact your pharmacy to find out if they have a drug-take-back program.

MODERN MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY IS A BLESSING, and medications can afford us longer, healthier, happier lives. But we must never forget that they are potentially dangerous chemicals, and must be treated with great care and respect.

To learn more about medication safety, go to

www.talkaboutrx.org

www.bemedwise.org

www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/medication-safety-tips-dos-donts

www.cdc.gov/getsmart/

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