

USING YOUR MEDICATIONS WISELY

DO

- Tell your doctors about all the medicines you are taking and about any allergies or sensitivity you may have to any drug.
- Be sure you understand all instructions before starting to use a drug — including when to take it, with what, how long to continue, what to do if problems occur.
- Make sure you take medicines when you're supposed to — which for people taking several drugs might mean having a system for keeping track.
- Call your doctor if you notice any new symptoms or side effects.
- Keep drugs in airtight containers and store them properly.
- Keep a permanent record of all drugs and vaccines you are sensitive or allergic to.

PREPARING FOR THE DOCTOR'S VISIT —WHAT TO BRING

As the doctor's partner, you should tell the doctor all he or she needs to know in order to diagnose your problem and prescribe the proper medicines. Think about the office visit beforehand — and while you do, prepare a written list of things to tell the doctor and questions you want to ask. If you have trouble writing, ask a friend or relative to help you prepare this list.

When you go to the doctor, bring all the medicines you are using, or — if it is easier — bring a written list of all of them. Include the drugs you take that do not require a prescription, such as aspirin or laxatives. Every doctor you see needs to know about all your medicines so he or she can avoid duplicating them or prescribing medicines that will cause a bad reaction when taken together with your medicines. One drug might harmfully reduce or increase the effects of another; or the combination of two drugs may produce a new and dangerous reaction.

You should also bring a written list of your allergies and the medicines you have had a negative reaction to.

DON'T

- Take more — or less — than the prescribed amount of any drug.
- Stop taking drug suddenly without checking with your doctor — even if you feel better.
- Mix alcohol and medication unless your doctor says it's ok. Although not all drugs react adversely with alcohol, many do.
- Take drugs prescribed for someone else, or give yours to someone else.
- Transfer a drug from its original bottle to another.

INFORMATION TO GET FROM THE DOCTOR

By the end of the visit, you should get instructions from the doctor for properly taking any medicines prescribed. Before leaving the office, you should know the answers to these questions for each drug prescribed for you:

- What am I taking?
- When and how often should I take it? Under what circumstances — before, with, after, or between meals? At bedtime? As needed?
- Will there be any side effects? Should I report them?

Materials were developed from: *Using Your Medicines Wisely: A Guide for the Elderly*, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Division of Resources Development, Prevention

Branch, by the Center for Human Services, 5530 Wisconsin Avenue, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20015, under Contract Number 271-77-4503. DHHS Publication No. (ADM) 90-705 Reprinted 1988, 1990 and 1994.



Funds for this document are provided by the Substance Abuse Program Office, Florida Department of Children and Families, contract #LD079.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL THE FLORIDA ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE ASSOCIATION RESOURCE CENTER
1030 EAST LAFAYETTE STREET, SUITE 100, TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32301 TEL: (850) 878-2196 • WWW.FADAA.ORG

PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE- COUNTER DRUGS

AN EDUCATIONAL FACT SHEET FROM
THE FLORIDA ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE ASSOCIATION

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) over \$78 billion worth of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs are produced each year in the United States. In 2001, 3.2 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 were current abusers of prescription drugs. This was a slight increase from 2000. But the increase of those youth who misused psychotherapeutics at least once in the year was larger, from 7.1 percent to 7.9 percent. Among college-aged adults, misuse of prescription drugs increased 33 percent from 9.3 percent in 2000 to 12.1 percent in 2001. Painkillers, such as oxycodone (Oxycontin) and hydrocodone (Vicodin) account for most of these increases. In 1993, the Drug Enforcement Administration estimated prescription drugs that were sold illegally cost abuser \$25 billion compared to \$31 billion spent that year on cocaine.

Over 20 million people over the age of 12, approximately 9% of the U.S. population, reported having used one or more psychoactive drugs (sedatives, stimulants and analgesics, both prescribed and OTC) for non-medical purposes at some time in their lives according to the 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. Stimulants and analgesics were the most widely used drug of abuse within this category. Psychoactive drugs are abused because they directly affect the brain and central nervous system (CNS), producing desired effects.

Drug abuse affects young and old alike, but older adults are at the greatest risk for misuse of medications, because they often use many different types of medications to treat one or more illnesses. Though this group comprises approximately 13 percent

of the population, they consume nearly one half of the prescription drugs sold each year. This problem may become increasingly prevalent as older adults are expected to comprise 20 percent of the U.S. population by 2030.

COMMON MEDICATIONS, THEIR USES AND EFFECTS

Stimulants. Amphetamines and caffeine are stimulants used primarily to delay the onset of mental and physical fatigue and to treat problems such as hyperactivity in children. Students studying long hours for exams, athletes who feel the drugs will improve their performance, and workers who want to stay awake on the job often use stimulants. These drug compounds are often found in diet pills, which, if used improperly, can lead to *anorexia nervosa*. Anorexia nervosa is a pathological loss of appetite thought to be psychological in origin that is manifested in extreme dieting and excessive thinness. Caffeine is also found in many beverages, pain medications and allergy and cold remedies. Unusually high doses or excessive use of stimulants over long periods of time can lead to anxiety, hallucinations, severe depression or physical and psychological dependence. From strong stimulants, such as cocaine and nicotine found in cigarettes, to caffeine in coffee and cola drinks, stimulants are an intimate part of our lives.

Analgesics. Some of the most widely used analgesics, available in both prescription and over-the-counter forms, include:

- **Aspirin.** The most common analgesic used today to treat fever, arthritis and pain; possible side effects can include nausea, heartburn or the development of bleeding ulcers. Aspirin should be taken with plenty of water or food to prevent stomach upset. Reye's Syndrome may

JUST THE FACTS

develop if aspirin is given to children with the flu or chicken pox. This disease is characterized by vomiting, swelling of the brain and liver and difficulty with mental functioning, and can often lead to death. People with liver damage should also avoid using aspirin.

- **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol) is used to treat aches, pains and fevers and is generally free from side effects. Large doses or overuse of this drug may cause rashes, fevers or changes in blood composition. People with kidney or liver problems should consult a doctor before using acetaminophen.
- **Ibuprofen** (Motrin, Advil, Nuprin) is used to relieve pain associated with arthritis, menstrual cramping and discomfort, fever and muscle strains. Possible side effects might include upset stomach, dizziness, drowsiness, headache or ringing in the ears. Overuse of this drug may lead to confusion, tingling in hands and feet, and vomiting.
- **Narcotic Analgesics.** These are prescription medications such as Codeine, Morphine, Demerol, Dilaudid, Darvocet, Percodan and Percocet. They are widely used non-medically for their psychoactive effects and may be the most abused prescription medications. They should never be used in combination with alcohol or sedatives. Excessive use can cause respiratory arrest, shock, cardiac arrest, hallucinations, lack of coordination and rapid heartbeat. Analgesic users should be aware of any allergies they may have to these drugs, and use them according to label directions.
- **Antidepressants.** These are prescription medications used to treat depression, a disease affecting approximately 10% of the US population. Some of the original drugs of this group were Nardil, Tofranil and Elavil. Although not technically an antidepressant, lithium, which is used to treat manic depression, is often included in this group. The side effects of prolonged and excessive use of these drugs are excessive urination or thirst, diarrhea, vomiting, drowsiness, dizziness or muscle weakness. Some newer antidepressants that show great promise in treating this disease are Wellbutrin, Prozac, Zoloft, Effexor, and Serzone. The incidence of side effects with these seem to be less than with the previously used medications.

- **Sedative-Hypnotics and Tranquilizers.** Benzodiazepines are the most widely prescribed tranquilizers and sleep-inducing medications. They are also the most abused by the public. Drugs used to treat anxiety and tension are Valium, Xanax, Ativan and Tranxene. Drugs used for sleeping include Dalmane, Resotril and Halcion. Possible side effects include drowsiness, light-headedness and poor coordination. When the elderly use sleep-inducing benzodiazepines, the possibility of morning-after hangover syndrome is great. Overuse of these drugs can lead to sleeplessness, respiratory difficulties, coma and even death.
- **Barbiturates** are less commonly prescribed medications used to treat anxiety and insomnia. If improperly used, these drugs can cause depression or experience respiratory difficulties. Some examples are phenobarbital, Seconal and Nembutal. Non-barbiturates include Doriden, Placidyl and Chloral Hydrate.
- **Cough and Cold Preparations.** Colds are caused by viruses and typically last 7 to 10 days. Most cold preparations are designed to treat specific cold symptoms and provide temporary relief from discomfort. These medicines often contain pain relievers, decongestants, antihistamines and cough suppressants. Caution should be used when taking them, as they often cause drowsiness or excitability. Most widely used cold remedies include the following:
 - Antihistamines and Decongestants. These medications are typically used to relieve itchy, watery eyes and to reduce congestion due to allergies, colds and flu. They can also cause excitability or drowsiness. Activities such as driving that require mental alertness should be avoided when taking these drugs. OTC preparations containing antihistamines are often taken in excessive quantities to produce a high such as that experienced when abusing narcotics and sedatives.
 - Antitussives and Expectorants. Antitussives are cough suppressants used to treat painful, persistent coughs. Expectorants are used to help clear mucous from the respiratory system. Both medications may contain alcohol and some may contain narcotics, such as codeine, to relieve pain and induce sleep. Some may be addictive. Young people may abuse these medications for the effects derived from alcohol use, as the alcohol

content in some OTC preparations may be as high as 40 percent. These medications should not be taken beyond the recommended number of days or in greater doses than indicated on the label or by a doctor.

Taking these medications for prolonged periods of time may cover up other illnesses or health problems. A doctor should be notified in case of continued problems or new symptoms.

- Laxatives are among the most widely misused and abused OTC medications. This is particularly true among older adults and is due to misunderstanding of normal bowel function. Use of laxatives should be restricted to short-term use for constipation, since chronic use leads to dependency. This is primarily true of saline-type (Magnesium Citrate, Fleet Enema), stimulant-type (Ex-lax, Dulcolax), lubricants (Mineral Oil) and stool softeners (Colace). The last two types are useful for those who should not strain during defecation, such as heart patients, but may rapidly cause a laxative-dependant condition. Laxative Abuse Syndrome (LAS) may lead to fluid and electrolyte imbalances as well as vitamin and mineral deficiencies. The following guidelines when using laxatives are useful and may prevent their abuse: proper dietary fiber intake, adequate fluid intake and proper exercise. Laxative users should remember that these drugs are only a temporary measure and should restrict intake to a one week period unless specifically advised otherwise by their physician.

MISUSE AND DEPENDENCE

Misuse of prescription and OTC drugs can often lead to psychological and physical dependence. People may use increased amounts to insure a sense of well-being, to treat unrelated illnesses or health problems or for non-medical purposes. Many medications contain alcohol and narcotics such as codeine, which can be addictive and life-threatening. Use of alcohol, a depressant, with some prescription and OTC drugs may inhibit or increase the drug's effectiveness as well as cause depression, drowsiness, confusion, and loss of coordination. Combining OTC drugs with some prescription drugs can cause the same, or more harmful, types of reactions.

PREVENTING DRUG MISUSE

Both prescription and OTC medications can be very helpful in the treatment of health problems and injuries. The following are some points to remember about taking medication properly and preventing medication misuse, harmful reactions or drug interactions:

- Ask your doctor or read the OTC label information about the effects and/or side effects of drugs you take
- Take medications according to recommended dose and length of time
- Notify your doctor of any reactions to medications
- Dispose of any leftover prescription medications following the treatment of your illness or injury after checking with your doctor
- Inform your doctor of all medications you are currently taking, the dosages, and any allergies you may have to medications
- Do not use medications (prescription or OTC) to treat unrelated illnesses, pains, or injuries
- Discuss any special precautions you may need to take with use of medications. Ask if there are any problems with combining them with certain foods, alcohol, or other prescription or OTC medicines
- If you are pregnant, always consult your doctor before taking any type of prescription or OTC medication
- Never share your prescription medication
- If you are unsure of the effects of a medication, ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain them

Written in part by Marvin A. Friedman, PD, Rph, CAAP

RESOURCES

Prescription Drug Abuse II: What Can Be Done. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2003.