

# Beware of Medication Myths

Conventional wisdom is not always accurate when dealing with medication safety. Reliance on “medication myths” can cause serious health problems, some with long-lasting effects, cautions the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP).

Several common medication myths include:

**Myth: Nonprescription Medications Are Safer Than Prescription Medications.**

TRUTH: All medications, even those sold without a prescription, have the potential to cause harm. Taking more than the recommended dose can cause serious adverse effects, such as stomach bleeding, as well as liver or kidney problems. Adverse reactions to nonprescription medicines can sometimes occur even when patients follow instructions exactly. In addition, the effects of certain prescription medications can be significantly bolstered or weakened if taken with some nonprescription medicines. Patients should tell their physician and pharmacist about all the medications, including vitamins and herbal supplements, they are taking to help avoid potentially dangerous drug interactions.

**Myth: Herbals Are Safe Because They Are “Natural.”**

TRUTH: Herbal supplements can be dangerous because they are not regulated as drugs by the Food and Drug Administration, and no clinical studies are required to show their safety and effectiveness. In fact, studies have shown that the active ingredients within the same type of supplement can vary by up to 150 percent. Additionally, some herbal supplements can interact negatively with prescription and nonprescription medicines. Always tell your doctor and pharmacist about any herbal supplements you are taking.

**Myth: Splitting Pills Is Always A Safe Way To Save Money.**

TRUTH: Consumers, especially seniors, often split pills to save money, but doing so can disrupt essential properties of the medications. For example, some medications contain a time-release property that is destroyed when a pill is cut, reducing the medication’s safety. Also, because some pills are made with a protective coating to prevent nausea, an upset stomach may result if the coating is broken. Always ask your pharmacist if a pill is safe to split.

**Myth: Children Can Take Adult Medications In Smaller Doses.**

TRUTH: When it comes to medications, children are not small adults. Children may react differently than adults to the same medication. For example, antihistamines cause drowsiness in adults but may cause hyperactivity in children. The proper dosage for children may be lower than for adults; however, in some cases, children require larger doses than adults (such as with medications used to treat seizures). Always ask your child's doctor or pharmacist if you have questions about the correct dose of a medication.

**Myth: The Bathroom Medicine Cabinet Is A Good Place To Store Medications.**

TRUTH: Medications should never be stored in the bathroom because of the negative effects of excessive heat and humidity. Additionally, the bathroom is an easy place for children to explore, and medications should always be kept out of children’s reach.

Medicines should ideally be stored in a secure, dark location at 65 to 80 degrees, with little humidity.

**Myth: Medications Can Be Taken Safely With Any Liquid.**

TRUTH: Instructions on medication administration should be read carefully. Some liquids may enhance or diminish the effect of a medication. For example, grapefruit juice helps in the absorption of certain AIDS medications; however, it completely inactivates some medications for high blood pressure. Always check with your pharmacist to determine which liquids are safe to take with your medicines.

**Myth: Buying Medications On The Internet Is Safe.**

TRUTH: Consumers who buy medications via the Internet should exercise extreme caution. To stay safe, only buy medications from pharmacy Web sites that post the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy's VIPPS (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites) symbol. This is an important safeguard because consumers have no way of knowing the origin of these medications and no other way to determine if an Internet pharmacy is authentic. For example, a Web site may be based in Canada but may obtain its medications from Asia, where 30 percent of drug products have been found to be counterfeit. You should also stay away from Web sites that do not require a doctor's prescription for a prescription-only medicine. According to a National Consumers League survey, 30 percent of consumers who purchased prescription drugs online said they were not asked for a prescription.

**Myth: Receiving The Flu Shot Can Give You The Flu.**

TRUTH: Although some people may feel ill after receiving a flu shot, it is impossible for a flu vaccination to cause the flu. Also, it's important to remember that the vaccination you receive only protects you from particular virus strains. You may still get sick if you are exposed to a different strain. Flu vaccinations are an invaluable tool to protect you from a dangerous illness.

**Myth: My Spouse's Prescription For The Same Ailment Can Help Me.**

TRUTH: Taking a medication that is not prescribed for you is never recommended. This is because physicians prescribe medications based on an individual's needs and circumstances, taking into consideration factors such as age, weight, existing medical conditions and other prescriptions.

**Myth: My Doctor Knows Which Medications I'm Taking.**

TRUTH: In some cases, a doctor may not have your complete medical history. Therefore, you should take an active role in your own care by telling your physician about your medical history and reviewing with him or her all of the medications you are taking, especially if more than one doctor has prescribed medications for you. You should also feel free to ask your doctor or pharmacist any questions you have related to both prescription and nonprescription medications.