What you need to know to make sure that medicines help instead of hurt

Did you know over 20,000 kids per year need medical help due to medicine mistakes or misuse? Luckily, most of these errors can be prevented. Learn how you can help keep yourself and your family members safe!

Know the Facts: Over-the-Counter vs. Prescription Medicines

Medicines fall into two major categories: Over-the-counter (OTC) medicine is bought in a drugstore or supermarket without the need for a doctor’s prescription. Prescription medicine, on the other hand, is specially ordered by a doctor or nurse practitioner and is available only from a pharmacist. Only the person whose name is on the prescription should take that medicine.

Despite these differences, there are important safety points that OTC and prescription medicines share. First, children should use these medicines only with the permission of a parent or trusted adult. Also, it is always important to read the medicine label before each use. It is dangerous to misuse or abuse any type of medicine.

Directions: You are an editor preparing this article for publishing. Read the article, and help future readers understand the key ideas by using your critical-thinking skills to fill in the blank text features.

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Student Name: ____________________________

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Remember the story of Goldilocks and the three bears? She needed the porridge to be “just right.” Like Goldilocks, you need the “just right” dose of a medicine. Too little medicine may not be effective; too much medicine can cause you harm. Luckily, researchers have already figured out the appropriate dose that each person needs based on age, weight, and other factors. You can find this information in the “Directions” section of the Drug Facts label.

To take the correct dose of a medicine, always use the dosing device that is provided (often a small cup for a liquid). Dosing devices are customized to each medicine—you should never substitute a dosing device with kitchen spoons or any other household measuring device.

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Some people might think that because a medicine is available over the counter, it cannot cause any harm. However, misusing any medicine by not reading and following the medicine label carefully can lead to serious consequences. For example, certain ingredients may cause allergic reactions. Also, certain medicines can interact with other medicines and may cause side effects or harm when mixed. Many medicines contain the same kind of active ingredients, so it’s important to not take them at the same time. Furthermore, medicines will not work properly if not taken at the proper dose!

What should you do if you think that you or someone else has taken the wrong dose or wrong medicine, or if you just have questions about a medicine? Call the free and confidential Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222. Experts answer the phone year-round 24/7. Unlike 911, it doesn't have to be an emergency to call.

Safe Storage and Safe Disposal
If you have any younger siblings or small children in your life, you know that kids are naturally curious. That is why it is so important to make sure that all medicines are stored up, away, and out of sight.

When your family cleans out the medicine cabinet, be sure to follow the FDA’s guidelines for safe disposal of medicines. Mix OTCs with a substance people wouldn’t want to eat (e.g., kitty litter) and then place the mix in a closed container (e.g., sealed baggie) in the trash.

Be Part of the Solution
Every year, poison control centers manage about 80,000 cases involving medicine-dosing errors in children, tweens, and teens.2 Help eliminate this danger! Educate your family and community about medicine safety—and remember to always take medicine with the supervision of a parent or trusted adult.

Glossary

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________

1 AAPCC National Poison Data System query parameters: 2011–2016 annual average, ages 0–19, all unintentional and intentional misuse reasons for pharmaceutical exposure, cases en route to a health care facility or treatment recommended by specialist in poison information, all outcomes.