

## Medicine Safety

Taking medicine the right way can help a sick person feel better and get well. However, prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines account for more poisonings in the U.S. than any other substance. Medicine can be poisonous to us if we take too much, take the wrong thing, or if we combine two or more products which react poorly together.



### PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES

If your doctor prescribes medicine, follow the dose instructions exactly. It is not safe to cut pills in half to make your prescription last longer. Be sure to finish all of your medicine, even if your symptoms go away before you run out. Otherwise, your symptoms could return. If you develop any severe or unexpected side effects, tell your doctor right away. It is dangerous to take somebody else's prescription medicine, even if you share the same symptoms. Only your doctor can decide what prescription medicines are safe for YOU.

### OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINES



Read the "Drug Facts" label carefully before taking OTC medicine for safety information which can protect you from an accidental poisoning:

- Active ingredients:** This lists the name of the drug (or drugs) used to make this product. Taking two or more products with the same active ingredients at the same time can result in an accidental overdose.
- Uses:** Look for products that will treat ONLY the symptoms you have. Feel free to ask your pharmacist for help making the best choice.
- Warnings:** This section tells you if there are times when you should NOT take this medicine, such as if you are pregnant or if you have kidney disease. This section also lists any side effects you might experience, and if there are any activities, foods, or other drugs you should avoid while taking the medicine.
- Directions:** This tells you how much medicine to take, and how often. Measure carefully. Taking too much medicine or taking it too often is a frequent cause of accidental poisoning. Twice as much medicine does not mean twice the results!
- Inactive ingredients:** Check this section if you have allergies to certain substances or ingredients.

### "NATURAL" OR HERBAL DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

Many people use dietary supplements, sometimes called "natural," "herbal," or "botanical" products, for a wide range of health and wellness concerns. Some people incorrectly assume that since these products are "natural," they are completely harmless. In fact, dietary supplements contain active ingredients just like medicine. You can have side effects or poor interactions from dietary supplements, and you can experience harm if you take some products too much or too often. Always tell your doctor if you take dietary supplements, so they can help you avoid problems.



*Gingko biloba*

## AVOID MISTAKES



Store medicines for each member of the household in separate places. STOP and check the label. Make sure you can see it clearly; turn on the light, and put on your glasses if necessary. Be sure you are taking (or giving):

- The right product
- To the right person
- In the right amount
- At the right time

## MAKE A PLAN

People who take lots of medicine have an increased risk for poisoning. It can be difficult to keep track of all the different pills, liquids, and instructions. Some people like to keep a written schedule or journal. Some prefer watch alarms or other alert systems. Many people use special pill organizers, divided by days of the week or even by the hours of the day. Ask your pharmacist, doctor, or nurse to help you organize and keep track of all your prescription and OTC medicines. Make a plan that works for YOU.

## PROTECT YOUR LOVED ONES

Adult medicines are among the most dangerous poisons for children. For example, even one pill for diabetes or high blood pressure can be life-threatening for a child.

While there is no such thing as a child-proof medicine bottle, *child resistant* bottles can help prevent a child from getting inside. Use them whenever possible. Medicines, toiletries, and household products should be kept up high at all times, out of the sight and reach of children. If possible, take medicine where children can't watch. Never leave products unattended when young children are present, not even for a minute. Wait until you are ready to swallow your medicine before removing a pill from its container; don't leave it sitting on a counter or table. If you accidentally drop a pill, stop everything until you find it.



If you visit a home where young children live, ask for a safe place to store your medicines and products. Don't leave them in your purse, suitcase, or on the bathroom counter.

## DISCARD MEDICINE SAFELY

Some old, expired medicines may not work. In a few cases, they can actually be harmful. Removing unwanted or expired medicines from your home is the only guaranteed way to prevent someone being poisoned by them.

To discard, mix medicines with used coffee grounds, kitty litter, or something else no one would eat. Put this into a sealed plastic bag and toss with your household trash. Certain medicines should be flushed or poured down the sink. This method is reserved for drugs that could be misused or abused, or drugs that could be exceptionally dangerous for children. More information available from the U.S. Food & Drug Administration: [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov). (Type "discard" into the FDA website search bar).

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Need help with a medicine mistake or any other harmful substance? Call the Blue Ridge Poison Center, 24-hours a day, every single day. Specially trained nurses will tell you exactly what to do. FREE and confidential. 1-800-222-1222.