Medicated Skin Patches: Convenient, but Use with Caution

STORY #1: A father notices during dinner that his 3 year old daughter is acting drowsy and weak. The child vomits; the father removes her clothes to clean her up and discovers a couple of nicotine patches on her belly. The father recently began using nicotine patches to help him quit smoking. He contacts the Blue Ridge Poison Center. The poison center nurse advises the father to remove the patches, wash the skin with soap, and take the child immediately to the emergency department. Doctors administer supportive care to the child until her symptoms resolve.

STORY #2: A man is discovered unconscious and barely breathing by his family. He had been prescribed fentanyl (a pain reliever) patches earlier in the day for pain, and was wearing 3 of them on his skin. The prescription instructions were to place only one patch on his skin. Doctors were able to revive the man who admitted that he put 3 patches on his skin because “I was in a lot of pain, and I usually take more than just 2 aspirin, so I figured more than one patch would be okay.”

Medicated adhesive skin patches, or transdermal patches, are placed on the skin and worn for a prescribed amount of time. The medicine is released from the patch into the body through the skin slowly over time. Patches are an option.

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for those who have trouble swallowing pills, or for whom pills upset the stomach. Also, patches can provide a steady release of a drug so that there is no need to remember to take multiple doses of medicine daily.

Many drugs are available in patch form, including:

- Hormone replacements
- Birth control
- Nicotine (to help people stop smoking)
- Motion sickness drugs
- Drugs that treat angina, a painful cardiovascular condition
- Drugs that treat chronic, severe pain

Medicine patch users must take steps to avoid accidental overdose, harmful side effects, or exposures in children. According to the FDA, one man did not survive after his wife misunderstood the instructions and applied six prescription pain relief patches to his body at the same time. Others have become sickened when they forgot they were wearing a patch and took medicine or swallowed another substance (such as alcohol) that interacted poorly. Errors can also happen when users place the patch on the wrong part of their body, on skin that is inflamed, or when a heating pad is placed over the patch causing increased release of drug.

There are many reports of children getting their hands on medicine patches and then sticking them all over their body. Children will also chew, suck, or swallow patches. One little girl was discovered by doctors to have 6 medicine patches stuck to the roof of her mouth. Even a used patch that a child discovers in a trash can could have enough residual medicine in it to cause harm.

Use Medicine Patches Safely

Avoid dangerous interactions. Be sure your doctor knows about every other medicine you take, including over-the-counter products and supplements, before you start using a patch.

Make sure you read the instructions, and if anything is unclear, ask your doctor or pharmacist. When it comes to medicines, there is no such thing as a “stupid question.”

Check periodically to make sure the patch is still in place, especially after sleeping, changing clothes, or showering.

Unless the directions say otherwise, patches should remain intact. Don’t cut them into smaller pieces or open them in any way.

Additional steps to protect children and pets

Store patches UP & AWAY, out of the sight and reach of children and pets.

If you discover a patch is missing from your body, stop everything until you find it before your child or your pet finds it.

When you remove a patch, fold it in half so that it sticks to itself before throwing away. Some manufacturers recommend flushing the patch if you have young children, as they might retrieve a discarded patch from a trash can and could pry it open or swallow it.

If you suspect that a child has had any contact with a patch call the poison center right away. Don’t wait for symptoms. 1-800-222-1222 day or night. Free and confidential.
good time to remind everyone about pets and poisoning.

“My puppy just licked paint from a spill on the floor, what should I do?” “My cat just ate part of my houseplant, is it poisonous?” These are examples of calls to the Blue Ridge Poison Center from frantic pet owners whose animals have chewed, swallowed or played with something harmful. Like young children, animals do not know what is safe and what is poisonous. Some foods and medicines that are safe for people may not be safe for animals. Some substances that are poisonous to animals, such as antifreeze, chocolate, or bone meal fertilizer, might actually smell and taste good to a pet. Dogs in particular explore the world with their mouths, just as babies do.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), here are some things commonly found in homes and outdoors that could make your pet sick:

**FOOD**
- Chocolate
- Raisins and grapes
- Macadamia nuts
- Alcohol
- Onions, garlic, and chives
- Caffeine
- Xylitol (a sweetener used in some gum, candies, etc.)

**IN THE HOME**
- Mothballs
- Essential oils
- Batteries
- Cleaning products
- Lamp oil
- Medicines (both prescription and over-the-counter)
- Tobacco and nicotine products

**IN THE GARAGE**
- Paint solvents
- Gasoline
- Ice melt chemicals
- Antifreeze

**IN THE YARD**
- Snail & slug baits
- Fertilizers, including bone and blood meal
- Insecticides and rodenticides
- Many plants, including: Lilly of the valley, foxglove, oleander, & several types of bulbs.

This is not a complete list. If you suspect your pet swallowed or chewed on anything unusual, call your veterinarian or an animal poison control center.

There are two animal poison control centers in the U.S. Both are staffed by veterinarian toxicologists and are open 24 hours a day, every single day. (Note that both animal poison control centers charge a small consultation fee).

**ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center:**
- (888) 426-4435
- [https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control](https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control)

**Pet Poison Helpline:**
- (855)-764-7661
- [https://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/](https://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/)

It is better to prevent, rather than treat, a poisoning. Here are some guidelines:
- Keep trash bins tightly covered or concealed.
- Keep all medicines, household products, and...
other poisons stored out of the sight and reach of pets.

- Don’t forget about purses, suitcases, and backpacks. They might contain dangers such as candy, tobacco products, or medications. Store them safely out of your pets’ reach.

- If you drop a pill, stop everything until you find it before your pet does.

- In winter, wipe your pet’s feet and belly after being outdoors in places where people have used ice melt chemicals.

- Never give any human medications or supplements to your pet without your Veterinarian’s permission.

POISON TRIVIA ANSWER: (C) 7-Up. It’s original name was Bib-Label Lithiated Lemon-Lime Soda, eventually shortened to Lithiated Lemon Soda. It was marketed as having numerous health benefits. Early ads used the slogan “Fresh up—keep smiling.” The use of lithium citrate in foods and beverages was banned in 1948.

Below: An early 7-Up advertisement:

News & Notes

Thank you to all who recently completed the Blue Ridge Poison Center’s Public Education Survey. Nearly 200 people participated and provided us with insightful feedback and ideas. We will be incorporating all of it into upcoming programs and resources. Here are some highlights:

- Sixty-five percent of participants reported that they need resources to teach others about poisoning prevention, most notably (in order highest to lowest):
  - PreK and/or parents of preK
  - Elementary school children
  - Co-workers & colleagues

- The resources that participants ranked as the most useful—both for themselves and for any groups they planned to teach about poisoning prevention—are (in order highest to lowest):
  - Tabletop display and/or giveaway materials.
  - Online library of downloadable materials.
  - Short on-demand videos.

- When asked to choose which poison topics interested them the most, participants ranked household poison dangers, medicine safety, and snakes and spiders the highest. They ranked marijuana and lead poisoning the lowest.

Congratulations to the winners of our survey raffle!

Sonja Coulon (Fredericksburg)
Heidi Sheltman (Lexington)
Melissa Lowe (Broadway)
Michael Swenson (Stanley)
Virginia Tyree (Lynchburg)