

A Prescription for Safety

Hi, this is Lenore Kelley, Chief Pharmacist for CIGNA Home Delivery Pharmacy, with some tips on how to keep you and your family safe from the potential dangers of prescription medications.

Before we talk about the risks though – I want to be sure to mention that today's medications allow doctors to treat many more conditions and keep people healthier than ever before. But -- not all of these advances are risk free, so I want to give you four things to think about related to using your medications safely.



First, know what's in your medicine cabinet:

Keep a complete list of all the medications you or your family members may be taking. Include prescription medications, herbal supplements, and medications taken without a prescription. Then share this list with all your doctors and pharmacy.

You also want to be sure to keep your medications out of the reach of children and pets. You may want to lock them up if possible. If young children or pets do manage to get into your medication, they won't be able to tell you how much they may have taken. That's why it's a good idea to have an estimate of how much medication is in each container. And, be sure to call your family physician or vet if you suspect your children or pets might have gotten into the medicine cabinet.

Knowing how much medicine you have in the house can also help if you suspect that a member of your family may be abusing drugs. Knowing whether medication is missing allows you to find out quickly if there's a problem, intervene on their behalf and get them into treatment.

Another good strategy is to fill all your prescriptions at the same retail or home delivery pharmacy so you have your complete record in one place.

When traveling, make sure you have all of your medications with you, a complete list of all the medications and herbal treatments you are taking, as well as the name and phone number of your doctors and pharmacy. That way, if something happens while you are away and you need a prescription or over-the-counter medicine for a new ailment, such as a cold, the pharmacist can review all your medications to make sure there are no potential drug inter-actions. Be sure to notify your doctor as soon as you get home about any new medications you might be taking.

The second tip is to store your medications safely:

Many people store their medications in the bathroom. But this popular spot is actually one of the worst places to keep medicine. Bathroom cabinets tend to be warm and humid, which can cause medicines to lose their effectiveness before their expiration dates. This is especially true for tablets and capsules. For example, a warm, muggy environment can cause aspirin tablets to break down into acetic acid (vinegar) and salicylic acid, both of which can potentially irritate your stomach.

Also, take the cotton plug out of the medication bottle, as the cotton can also draw moisture into the container. Keep the containers tightly closed and medicines in their original bottles.

continued >>



Instead, keep medicines in a cool, dry place and out of a child's reach. If medicines are stored in the kitchen, store them away from the stove, sink, and any other heat-releasing appliances.

When filling your prescription, ask your pharmacist about any specific storage instructions.

Next is handling:

Check the expiration date each time you take a drug. Throw out and replace any medications that are out of date.

Never use a medication that has changed color, consistency, or odor, regardless of the expiration date. Throw away capsules or tablets that stick together, are harder or softer than normal, or cracked or chipped.

Travelers should take extra care with their medications:

- Pack your medicine in a carry-on bag instead of a checked suitcase.
- Bring an extra supply with you in case your return is delayed.
- Never leave medicines in an automobile, where heat can rapidly destroy the drug.
- Watch time changes. Set a separate watch to your usual time so you can remember when to take any medication.

And finally, there is the safe disposal of medications:

Simply throwing medications in the garbage or flushing them down the toilet can harm our environment and affect the quality of drinking water. So please dispose of medications according to federal prescription drug disposal guidelines which urge Americans to:

- Take unused, unneeded or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers
- Mix the prescription drugs with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter, and put them in non-descript containers that won't leak, such as empty jars or sealable bags to ensure the drugs are not found or accidentally eaten by children or pets
- Throw these containers in the trash
- Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet unless the information you get with your medications specifically states that it is safe to do so.
- Many pharmacy chains and communities offer a "take-back" service where you can return unused, unneeded or expired prescription drugs.

You can find more information on medication safety by visiting epa.gov, wastemd.com, or safeneedledisposal.org.

Remember, staying informed about your medications can help keep you and your family safe.

Thanks for listening. For more CIGNA health-related podcasts visit www.cigna.com/podcasts or go to iTunes and search for "CIGNA."