

Smart About Medicine

by Jennifer Magid

Check out these dos and don'ts for taking medicine safely.

Did you know that almost one out of three teens think there is nothing wrong with using prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription, according to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America?

Medicines can help people fight illnesses and get better faster, and can keep people from getting sick in the first place. But if they aren't taken correctly, medicines may cause more harm than good. Read on to learn more about responsible medicine use.

DO take all your antibiotics.

Here's a scenario: After three days of taking the medicine your doctor prescribed for strep throat, you feel great. You still have seven days' worth of pills left. Is it OK to stop taking them and shove them to the back of the medicine cabinet until the next time you get sick?

Nope! Always finish taking all the *antibiotics* (bacteria-fighting drugs) prescribed by your doctor, even if you start to feel healthy again. "When bacteria are undertreated, they have a chance to multiply," says Dr. Tanya Arora, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "You get bacteria that no longer respond to the antibiotic." Some antibiotics don't just get rid of bacteria, Arora adds. Some also help prevent other problems. For instance, strep throat that is not fully treated can lead to rheumatic fever, an illness that can damage the heart.

Don't take someone else's medicine.

The most common way teens get medications they aren't supposed to be taking is from a friend or a relative, according to the 2008 Monitoring the Future survey. But sharing your medicine, or taking another person's medication, can be dangerous. It's also illegal.

"If the drug was not prescribed for you, you don't ... have your own doctor's knowledge of how the prescription medicine will interact with your own body [or] with other medicines you may be taking," says Steve Pasierb, president of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. That means you could get very sick.

Plus, if you take someone else's medicine, that person won't have enough of it. Pharmacists cannot refill a prescription if a medication has been used up before it should have been. That could put the other person's health in danger.

DO make sure you are taking the correct dose.

Every week, approximately one in 10 kids use some kind of cough and cold medicine, according to experts at Boston University. Cough and cold medicines can be a big help when you're sniffing and sneezing. But because you can buy them without a prescription, many people don't realize just how

dangerous those drugs can be if they are misused.

While cough medications may have different names, they often have the same or similar ingredients. For example, the ingredient *diphenhydramine*, which treats coughs, can make you stop breathing if you take too much.

"These medications are not meant to take away all your symptoms and make you feel back to normal -they only help a little bit," Arora says. Taking more than you should won't help your symptoms.

DO find out whether your medicine shouldn't be mixed.

Sometimes, drugs can interact with other drugs, foods, or vitamins. For example, iron supplements can keep *tetracycline*, a common antibiotic, from working. Grapefruit juice affects a number of medicines, such as ones for heart disease and allergies, as well as some that fight infections.

Certain vitamins and supplements for athletes can have damaging effects on the kidneys and liver. "It is important that your doctor know [what you are taking] so that they avoid prescribing medications that may worsen that damage," says Virginia Cox of the Consumer Healthcare Products Association.

Don't take expired meds.

Some medicines don't work as well as time passes or if they are kept in high temperatures. Expired medicine may not work as intended. That is why it is better to always go to the doctor rather than try to figure out on your own what you ought to do.

"Your self-diagnosis may be wrong, and the prescription medicine you take may have a negative impact on what is truly wrong with you," says Pasierb.

Rx Quick Check

Put your medicine smarts to the test.

1. You have a fever but otherwise feel OK. Should you take a medicine that treats fever, sore throat, sneezing, and coughing?

(A) **yes**

(B) **no**

2. Your family has a bottle of medicine with an expiration date of 08/09. That means it was safe to use until

(A) **September 2008.**

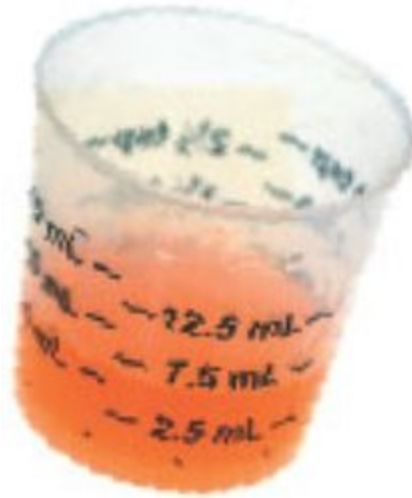
(B) **August 2009.**

(C) **2008 or 2009.**

3. **True or False:** Abusing over-the-counter or prescription medications can be just as dangerous as abusing illegal street drugs.

Answers:

1. B (Avoid taking unnecessary medicines.);
2. B;
3. True



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Measuring Up

You may have heard the expression "Don't judge a book by its cover." Don't judge a spoonful by the spoon, either.

Kitchen teaspoons-the kind you eat with-shouldn't be used to take liquid medicines. That's because not all spoons are alike. Spoons can hold anywhere from 4 milliliters of liquid to 10 milliliters, according to a study by doctors in Minnesota. However, the correct amount of liquid in a teaspoon serving is 5 milliliters. Use a medicine measuring cup instead. Then you can be sure it is the right dose.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the passage, how many teenagers think there is nothing wrong with taking prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription?

- A. one out of ten teenagers
- B. one out of four teenagers
- C. one out of three teenagers
- D. about half of teenagers

2. The passage gives readers a list of things they should and should not do with medicines. Which of the following does the writer include in the passage?

- A. you do not always need to finish taking all the antibiotics prescribed
- B. you can take someone else's medicine
- C. you can mix medicine with any other foods, drugs or vitamins
- D. you should not take expired medicine

3. Based on the passage, it is likely that

- A. all medicines are safe to mix with other drugs, foods or vitamins
- B. people always take all of their antibiotics
- C. many people do not use medicines correctly
- D. no one ever shares their medication with other people

4. Read the following sentences:

"Some medicines don't work as well as time passes or if they are kept in high temperatures. Expired medicine may not work as intended."

As used in the passage, **expired** means

- A. too pass on
- B. prescribed
- C. past a certain date
- D. before a certain date

5. What is the central idea of this passage?

- A. how to take medicine responsibly
- B. how to get a prescription for an illness
- C. different kinds of medicine
- D. how to take medicine for a cold

6. According to the passage, what are the two reasons people should not take someone else's

medicine?

7. Based on the passage, are medicines that you can get without a prescription safer than those with a prescription? Why or why not?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Grapefruit juice can affect a number of medicines, _____ you should ask your doctor if it is safe to drink it with your medication.

- A. before
- B. so
- C. because
- D. after

9. Which image best demonstrates the meaning of the word interacting?



10. According to the passage, which of the following can interact with medicine: water or grapefruit juice? Why?