



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

Volume 7 • Issue 2 • March 30, 2016

Is this Over-the-Counter Medicine Safe for Me?

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are drugs that are sold without a prescription in pharmacies and other locations. Because OTC medicines are so readily available, people may think these products cannot cause harm; however, the opposite is true. Some OTC products contain medicines that can lead to harm if taken improperly. Even when they are used according to directions, some OTC medicines can cause harm when used by people with certain medical conditions.

A recent report to SafeMedicationUse.ca highlights the importance of using care in selecting OTC medicines, especially if you have certain pre-existing medical conditions. A consumer with a stuffy nose sought advice from a pharmacist. The pharmacist recommended an OTC medicine containing pseudoephedrine, a decongestant. At the time, the pharmacist did not know that the consumer had a heart condition that made pseudoephedrine an unsuitable choice. Fortunately, the consumer had been warned by a heart specialist not to take any medicine containing a decongestant. The consumer checked the product content and warnings and chose not to take the medicine.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following advice for people with known medical conditions who are considering an OTC medicine:

- When seeking advice about an OTC medicine, always tell the pharmacist or other healthcare provider about your medical conditions.
- Keep an updated list of your medicines with you. Show it to your healthcare providers whenever you are asking for advice about medicine use or about a new health problem.
- Check the labels and package inserts of OTC medicines carefully for ingredient information, warnings about who should not use the products, and when to seek medical advice.
- Consult a pharmacist or other healthcare provider if you are not sure whether an OTC medicine is safe for you to use.

Tips for Practitioners:

- Before recommending an OTC medicine, always ask the patient about pre-existing medical conditions and the medications that the consumer is already taking.
- Be aware that, because of brand extensions, brand names previously associated with certain ingredients may now contain different or additional ingredients.

Read more about selecting OTC medicines:

www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_SameBrandName.html

Medication Safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts

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