



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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Misconceptions about Medicines that Could Be Deadly: Part 2

In the second part of this series, we highlight another misconception that was identified in an ISMP Canada [analysis](#) of errors with medicines that resulted in death. In that analysis, we specifically looked for errors that happened in a person's home or that involved medicines given by a person who did not have professional healthcare training. If you missed the first part of this series, you can read it here: http://safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception1Storage.html

Misconception Two: If one is good, two will be better.

When it comes to medicines, the idea that “more is better” is a dangerous misconception. This misconception has led some people to take large amounts of a medicine, thinking the extra dose will lead to greater relief or faster action. Some people may also think that nonprescription medicines or those applied to the skin are unlikely to cause harm. However, taking the right amount of any medicine—no more, no less—is critical. Taking too much of a medicine may cause harm or even death.

Through work with provincial agencies that investigate unexpected deaths, ISMP Canada learned of a tragic incident in which too much of a particular medicine resulted in death. The consumer used too much of a nonprescription herbal medicine that contained methyl salicylate (also known as oil of wintergreen) for relief of arthritis pain. The medicine was intended to be applied on the legs once or twice daily. However, members of the consumer's family saw her applying it more frequently, despite repeated reminders about proper use. Overuse of this medicine led to multiple medical problems that contributed to the consumer's death.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following advice for consumers to prevent this type of event:

- Always read the label carefully before taking any medicine. Follow the directions provided, and never take more than the recommended dose. Taking an extra dose of certain medicines, or taking a dose earlier than instructed, could cause severe harm.
- Take note of the recommended maximum daily dosage of your medicine. This is the total amount of medicine that can be safely taken in one day. Keep track of the amount of medicine that you take, and ensure that you do not take more than the recommended maximum daily dose.
- Herbal medicines may interact with your prescription medicines. Tell your doctor and your pharmacist about any herbal medicines you are taking.
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of overdose for your medicines, and know when to seek medical attention.
- If you are unsure about how to take your medicines, ask your pharmacist or another healthcare professional.

Tips for Practitioners

- To verify that your patient understands the dosing regimen for any medication that you dispense, ask the patient to repeat the dosage (amount and frequency) back to you.
- Educate your patients about the importance of not taking more than the prescribed dose of any medicine, including nonprescription and herbal medicines.
- When performing a medication review, ask patients about their use of herbal medicines and check for potential interactions with prescription medicines.



This is the second in a 3-part series dispelling misconceptions about medicines.

Read more at: [Misconception #1: It doesn't matter where I keep my medicines](http://safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception1Storage.html)
http://safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception1Storage.html

Medication Safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts

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