



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

# SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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## How Much Iron Is in Here?

SafeMedicationUse.ca received a report from a consumer who almost took 10 times the amount of iron that was prescribed. She was recommended to take 300 milligrams (mg) daily by her doctor. The label on the iron product showed the iron content as “35 mg”, so the consumer calculated that she needed 9 or 10 tablets every day.

Fortunately, the consumer was uncomfortable taking so many iron pills. She contacted the pharmacy to ask for more information. She learned that the 35 mg on the product label referred to elemental iron. The 300 mg recommended dose referred to the iron salt. With this product, 35 mg of elemental iron is equal to 300 mg of iron salt. In other words, the doctor wanted the patient to take just 1 tablet daily.

### Labels Can Be Confusing

The label tells you how much iron is in each tablet or capsule. The label will state either the amount of iron on its own (known as “elemental iron”) or the amount of iron in combination with another ingredient (known as “iron salt”). It is important to know which type of iron the label describes, because this tells you how much of the product to take. Having too much iron in your body can be dangerous for your health.

Health Canada is moving towards the use of a product facts table for natural health products such as iron. This table will provide information in a standard format to help consumers.



**Elemental iron** is the amount of iron that will be available for your body to absorb.

The tablet strength of the product above is shown as elemental iron: 300 mg tablet of ferrous gluconate contains 35 mg of elemental iron.



**Iron salt** is iron that has been combined with other ingredients.

Ferrous fumarate is an example of an iron salt.

The capsule strength of the product above is 300 mg of ferrous fumarate, which contains 100 mg of elemental iron.

### SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following suggestions for consumers:

- Ask your doctor to give you directions for how to take iron in writing, whenever possible.
- Ask your pharmacist to help you choose the right product.
- Double check the directions (how much, when) with the pharmacist.
- Read more tips on using iron products safely:  
[Take Care with Iron Supplements - "Too Much of a Good Thing" Can Be Dangerous!](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_supplements.html)  
 (www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter\_supplements.html)

## Consumer Questionnaire about Selection and Purchase of Natural Health Products Available from February 3 to 28, 2020

### INTRODUCTION

The [Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada \(ISMP Canada\)](#), in collaboration with Health Canada, is seeking information **to better understand the consumer experience with selecting and using self-care products, specifically natural health products (NHPs)**. NHPs contain naturally occurring ingredients that must be safe to use without a prescription.

We are interested in collecting information about consumers' experiences with the selection and purchase of NHPs and whether consumers are faced with product selection problems, such as confusing labelling or packaging, which could lead to negative consequences. The information gathered will help to inform policy development.

The online questionnaire will be active for 4 weeks in February. ISMP Canada is responsible for administering the questionnaire on Health Canada's behalf.

### QUESTIONNAIRE INFORMATION

**A link to the online questionnaire is available from the ISMP Canada consumer web page** (<https://safemedicationuse.ca/> or directly at <https://www.ismp-canada.org/NHP>).

The questionnaire should take about 15 minutes to complete.

***Confidentiality will be maintained. No personally identifiable information will be requested.***

Please feel free to share this message with your friends and relatives, as this will help us gather more information.

If you are affiliated with an association or an organization, please forward this notice to your membership.

### Medication safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts.

This newsletter was developed in collaboration with Best Medicines Coalition and Patients for Patient Safety Canada.

Recommendations are shared with healthcare providers, through the ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin, so that changes can be made together.

This newsletter shares information about safe medication practices, is noncommercial, and is therefore exempt from Canadian anti-spam legislation.