

What's in Your Medicine Cabinet? Knowing the Answer Can Save Lives

UC San Diego Experts Offer Helpful Hints, Important Guidelines for Medicine Safety

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Can you name the medications and supplements you take each day and why? Or is taking medication just habit? In honor of National Pharmacy Month, experts from UCSD Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences want to remind San Diego to "Know your medications. Know your pharmacist."

"Treating any condition with medications, prescriptions or over-the-counter drugs, is much easier when the patient (or caregiver) takes an interest in understanding which medicines they take and why," said Grace Kuo, Pharm.D., MPH, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Clinical Pharmacy, UCSD Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences; Associate Adjunct Professor of Family and Preventive Medicine, UC San Diego School of Medicine; and Director of San Diego Pharmacist Resource & Research Network.

Data collected by the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) shows a clear correlation between the strength of the patient-pharmacist relationship and a patient's comfort level and ability to ask questions about their medication. The APhA, the largest professional association of pharmacists in the United States, created National Pharmacy Month to encourage customers to regularly interact with their pharmacist in order to better understand their prescription and over-the-counter medications.

"Pharmacists no longer simply dispense drugs. The pharmacy itself has become a health care center," said Dr. John Gans, CEO and Executive Vice President of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA). "Pharmacists are actively changing their practices to meet the challenges of the health care system and their patient needs and demands." "Consumers should expect their pharmacists to provide good service, such as medication-counseling services, drug regimen reviews and interaction checks, coordination of patient care with health care providers, and monitoring of side effects," added Kuo.

Dr. Kuo offered some additional helpful hints.

Cautionary Advice about Children and Medications:

Keep "Over-the-Counter" (OTC) medicines out of sight and reach of children.

Never give adult medicines to a child.

Never give two or more medicines with the same ingredients at the same time.

Never give antihistamines to make a child sleepy.

Follow directions exactly, giving only the recommended dose, using the measuring device that comes with the medicine.

Check with your pharmacist or physician if you have any questions.

Medication Complications in Older Adults:

With age, there is an increase in chronic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases or diabetes. Delayed or inappropriate treatment can be far more damaging than to a younger adult.

Research shows that half of the people hospitalized for adverse drug reactions are over age 65.

Older adults may be taking multiple medications for more than one problem.

Older adults may be filling prescriptions at more than one pharmacy.

Remember: Pharmacists and healthcare providers intend to provide the best care possible but patient awareness is key in preventing medication errors and unnecessary adverse drug reactions.

A Smart Consumer Knows:

About interactions with food, other medicines, or dietary supplements that can effect how medicines work.

That some interactions can be dangerous.

When picking up a new medicine, ask if it will work safely with other prescription and nonprescription medicines you may be taking.

To tell your pharmacist and physician about any herbal products that you may be using.

"Following a pharmacist's advice can improve patient satisfaction, cut down on adverse reactions, and may also save money for consumers," added Kuo. "Not following a medicine's instructions or discontinuing its use without consulting with a health care provider can lead to complications or more expensive treatment."

About Grace Kuo, Pharm.D., MPH. Dr. Kuo teaches at both the UC San Diego pharmacy school and the medical school. Her research focuses on medication safety, practice-based health services research, and chronic disease management. Current investigative projects include: The Effect of Electronic Medical Records on Medication Safety, Effects of Literacy on Medication Safety in the Elderly, Safe Use of Medications in Primary Care Practices, and Pharmacogenomics Education Program: Bridging the Gap between Science and Practice.

About UCSD Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

The Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at UC San Diego entered its first class of twenty-five Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) students in the fall of 2002. Today, 60 new students are admitted each year. The Skaggs School is one of only two public pharmacy schools serving California.

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