



IT'S YOUR HEALTH



Safe Use of Medicines

The Issue

Prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines can help cure diseases and make you feel better. But it is important to use medicines carefully.



Background

All medicines carry some risk. Your body can have a mild reaction to a medicine, like a minor rash, or a **serious allergic reaction**. Often, these reactions are unexpected. It is important that you are aware of the risks of each medicine and weigh them against the benefits before you decide to take it.

The Risks of Taking Medicine

Some of the risks of using medicine include:

- **adverse reactions** when the medicine is combined with certain foods, beverages, vitamins, and herbal or other medicines – the more of these you combine, the greater the chance of a reaction
- the medicine not working as prescribed
- the medicine causing more health problems

Minimizing Your Risk

Only you can decide what level of risk is acceptable for you or your family. There are several steps you can take to help you reach the right decision.

Be informed - Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or other health care professional about all aspects of your **medication**.

- Tell them about any health conditions you have, like allergies and sensitivities, and what medications, including **Natural Health Products**, you are currently taking.

- Discuss any questions or concerns you might have. Be sure to mention if you are [pregnant](#), breastfeeding or planning to have a baby. Mention any difficulties you might have swallowing medicines or remembering to take them.
- Ask your doctor why you are being prescribed the medication, how your medicine should work, whether you need regular check-ups or tests, and if there are any side effects or interactions with food, beverages (like [grapefruit juice](#)), vitamins or herbal supplements.



- Ask about ways to decrease the chance of [side effects](#).
- Ask when you should expect to start feeling better, and if and when you should report back to your doctor.
- Ask your pharmacist for written information about the medicine you are taking.
- Make sure to read the drug label to be sure that you are using the medicine safely.
- Be aware that products with different names may contain the same ingredients, like acetaminophen (for example, Tylenol® and Tylenol® Sinus).

Be consistent - It is helpful to use the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions. The [pharmacist](#) can help you to identify any possible harmful interactions with other medicines that you are taking.

Keep a record - Keep an [up-to-date list of all medicines](#) you are taking. Include vitamins, herbal medicines, and prescription and non-prescription drugs, even if you only use them occasionally. Share this list with your doctor and pharmacist. Make sure that you know the brand names and the ingredients of the medicine you are taking. You should also know what each medicine looks like and how it should be stored.

Pay attention to and record how you feel after taking the medicine. Discuss any changes with your doctor or pharmacist and report any side effects.

Take control - Always use the medicine as directed by your doctor or pharmacist. Know when to take it, how often, and for how long. Know when and under what conditions you should stop using a medicine, and what to do if you miss a dose.

Keep medicines safe - Always keep medicines in their original containers, and never combine different medicines in the same bottle. Make sure you are taking the right medicine. Always read the label and



follow the directions closely.

Dispose of medicines properly - At least once a year, go through your medicine cabinet and [remove all prescription and non-prescription drugs](#) that are old or that you no longer take. Take them all back to your pharmacy or to your municipal waste disposal depot.



Health Canada's Role

Health Canada's [Marketed Health Products Directorate](#) coordinates the reporting of adverse reactions to medicines with the assistance of six Regional Adverse Reaction Reporting Centres (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic Region). Manufacturers of medicines are legally responsible to provide [Health Canada](#) with reports of serious adverse effects for all health products they sell in Canada. Voluntary reporting by health professionals and consumers also helps in monitoring the safety and effectiveness of marketed health products.

Health Canada regulates the safety and effectiveness of pharmaceuticals sold in Canada. This is done through a pre-market review (before product licensing is granted) and post-market surveillance of adverse events (after licensing). As part of this work, Health Canada monitors adverse events reported for pharmaceuticals sold in Canada and communicates safety information about these pharmaceuticals to health care professionals and the public.



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Need More Info?

To report an adverse reaction or interaction involving any health product, contact Health Canada at 1-866-234-2345 (toll free in Canada), or visit the *MedEffect Canada* web section at: www.health.gc.ca/medeffect

To get more information on how to use medications safely visit the following websites:

- Health Canada, *It's Your Health* medication chart at: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/chart-tableau-eng.php>
- The Public Health Agency of Canada's *Medication Kit* at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/public/medication/med/med-01-eng.php>
- Canadian Pharmacists Association, *Safe Medicines for Seniors: A Guide for Caregivers* at: http://www.pharmacists.ca/content/hcp/resource_centre/practice_resources/safe_meds_caregivers_en.cfm
- The Hospital for Sick Children, *Safe use of Pain Relief Medications* at: <http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/pain/safe-use-of-pain-relief-medications.aspx?articleid=7425&categoryid=pn-nh4-02a>

For more information visit the following web pages:

- *It's Your Health*, *Medications* listing at: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/alpha-eng.php#m>
- Information on drugs and other health products, Health Canada's *Drugs and Health Products* web section at: <http://www.health.gc.ca/drugproducts>
- Information on *Drug Identification Numbers (DINs)* at: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodpharma/activit/fs-fi/dinfs_fd-eng.php
- Information on *Natural Product Numbers (NPNs)* at: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodnatur/about-apropos/index-eng.php>
- Information about the Health Canada's drug approvals process at: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodpharma/activit/fs-fi/reviewfs_examenfd_e.html

For safety information about food, health and consumer products visit the *Safe Consumers* website at: www.health.gc.ca/consumer

For more articles on health and safety issues, go to the *It's Your Health* web section at: www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*