

Patient's pills get stuck on the way down

Dear Jo:

I take several medications for a variety of medical problems. I make sure to take what my doctor has prescribed and at the proper time, etc., but — I usually find the pills are difficult to swallow and seem to get "stuck" on the way down.

I have tried taking them with cold water, warm milk, Jello and even beer without much improvement. Is there any special liquid that is preferable for this necessary but unpleasant task?

G.J., Southern Reader

gerontology



A. Jolayne Farrell

Dear Mr. J.:

According to a recent controlled study in Denmark, the best way to take tablets (pills) is with cold carbonated water. Tablets taken this

way travel through the esophagus (the upper part of the digestive tract) rapidly and therefore have the least chance of causing discomfort or damage, particularly in the elderly.

Studies were done on the effects of lukewarm water, cold water, carbonated water and yogurt. Fluoroscopy was used to follow the passage of the tablets through the esophagus.

Passage time of tablets increased from 68 percent of the volunteers when taken with warm water to 82 percent when taken with cold water. It was further increased when the

tablets were taken with cold carbonated water.

The authors also found that yogurt achieved the same results as lukewarm water. Yogurt is sometimes a good alternative to water for certain older people providing that the medication can be taken with dairy products.

In explaining their results, the authors note that the carbon dioxide released from the carbonated water acts as an air cushion around the tablets thus causing them to move faster and without irritation through the esophagus.

Mr. J., although this study did not include beer, it is not recommended

because the alcohol in beer will interfere with the effects of the medication.

Readers can write to Jolayne Farrell at 11 Cynthia Crescent, Richmond Hill, Ontario L4B 1J3.

Ceramic ware probably safe

Q. We purchased some ceramic cookware in Europe last month. Is it safe to use?

B.C., Birmingham

A. Depending on the country where the cookware was purchased, it probably is safe.

Because of several cases of lead poisoning from using lead-glazed containers to prepare and store food, the FDA since 1971 has set limits on the amount of lead that can leach from any ceramicware — foreign or domestic.

In 1980 these "action levels" were further restricted. In addition, the FDA does sample tests on many products entering the country. There are also trade agreements where the country inspects and certifies the safety of its products to U.S. standards prior to exportation to the United States.

LEAD HAS BEEN a common component in glazing materials for ceramic dishes, bowls, pitchers, plates and other earthenware since civilization began.



Terry Gibb

It becomes a problem when these products are improperly manufactured.

A glaze containing lead must be heated, or fired, to a high enough temperature for a sufficient length of time to insure it is safe. The temperature and time vary according to the glaze formulation and size of the piece.

If the glazes are properly formulated, applied and fired, the final product is almost impervious to the effects of food or beverages.

The problem that an unsuspecting consumer faces is that there is no way to tell, by looking at a piece of ceramic, whether it has lead in it and if it was manufactured to meet the legal standards.

FDA GUIDELINES:

1. Avoid using ceramicware to store food. Glass or plastic, especially for foods with a high acid content, are safer. The acid in the food can increase the amount of lead released into the food.

2. Avoid using antiques or collectibles for food. Those "beautiful, old pieces of grandma's" were probably manufactured before any standards were imposed. Display — but don't use.

3. Be cautious of ceramicware made by amateurs and hobbyists. Safe glazes are available, but there's no guarantee they were applied and/or fired to the proper temperature.

There's no way of being 100 percent sure a product is safe without having it tested. Qualified commercial laboratories can test your items but it may be expensive. Your local health department can give you more information.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to The Consumer Mailbag, Concern, Detroit, One Kennedy Square, 4th Floor, Detroit, 48228.

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