

Learn to be a savvy prescription drug user

These days, it seems like you can't turn around without getting bombarded by advertisements for prescription drugs. All the ads, claims and choices can be confusing. Plus, drugs can interact, often with risky results. And it all costs money, either directly from our pockets or indirectly in our insurance bills.

That's why it's so important to be a savvy medical consumer, says a University of Michigan pharmacy expert. We need to make sure we're taking the right pills, that they don't interact dangerously with each other, and that we don't get sucked in by advertising and overlook less expensive alternatives.

There's a lot more information available from pharmacists, physicians and the Web. But also, the number of pharmaceuticals and the opportunities for problems has increased over the last few years. So the more knowledge, the more a patient can be their own advocate, and the better off he or she will be," says Art Poremba, manager of ambulatory pharmacy services at the U-M Health System.

Poremba offers a few simple tips for navigating this new world of medicine safely and with the best results for your health.

Tip 1: Talk to your doctor and pharmacist. They can help you find the best approach for your

conditions and symptoms, advise on preventive measures and spot potential drug interactions. You shouldn't be afraid to ask them anything. But too often, patients don't share enough information with these important members of their health care team, and they lose out on chances to get help or avoid problems.

"Patients frequently see many health care providers and could be getting medications from several physicians, each not aware of what the other is prescribing," Poremba says. "Some patients are reluctant to share information about drugs they're taking, including over-the-counter medications, herbal supplements and vitamins, but they can all have an impact on each other."

Tip 2: Watch drug ads with a skeptical eye. They're just like ads you see every day for breakfast cereal, cars and laundry detergent: carefully crafted, slick and even dramatic messages designed to make you think you want or need the product being advertised. The only thing you need to know is that drug companies couldn't advertise their prescription-only products directly to the public until just a few years ago.

Although the Food and Drug Administration keeps a careful eye on exactly what drug ads can say, it is difficult to provide complete drug information in an advertisement. Doctors

Facts about medicines and other substances:

- Ads for drugs that are available only by prescription are called "direct to consumer" ads.
- Prescription drugs can be brand-name or generic. The company that invents a drug can sell it exclusively using a brand name without price competition until the patent runs out. After that, other companies can sell it as a "generic."
- Non-prescription drugs are also called "over-the-counter." They can be brand-name or generic. Though the FDA regulates their safety and effectiveness, formulations can vary.
- Herbs, minerals, dietary supplements and vitamins do not have to meet any FDA standards for purity, active ingredients, dose or effectiveness. Most haven't been tested scientifically.

and pharmacists can help sort out what's right for you. But just because a drug is advertised as new or improved doesn't mean it's a huge breakthrough, warns Poremba.

"Often, the drug is portrayed as a major advance in therapy when that may not be the case. So it's very important for patients, when they have a question or they believe they want to consider a new drug, to approach their physicians," he says. "Do it in an open manner, and ask, 'Are there other agents available, or more cost-effective ones?' That will allow the appropriate type of communication to take place."

Tip 3: Don't forget about generics! The right drug for you may not be the one you see on TV, but one that isn't advertised at all. Poremba says hundreds of medicines are available as "generics" - with the same ingredients, the same doses, the same effectiveness, but for far less money.

How is this possible? Simple: the patent system. Drug companies that develop and patent new medicines get government protection for several years. During that time, other companies can't sell that drug. So the inventing company gives the drug a brand name and advertises it, trying to raise aware-

ness and sales, and to make back the research money spent to develop the drug.

But after the patent runs out, any company can use the process described in the patent to make that drug. They can sell it for less under its "generic" chemical name, without spending money on research or ads. The FDA holds them to the same strict safety and purity laws. And the drug has often been on the market long enough in enough people that side effects are fully known.

"Generic drugs are as safe and as effective as brand-name products," says Poremba. "There's no difference when it comes to active ingredients and quality standards, but generic drugs are typically 50 to 80 percent less expensive than the brand-name drug."

Some generic drugs are available by prescription only, but you can buy some "over the counter" as store-brand preparations. However, the FDA doesn't regulate over-the-counter drugs quite the same as prescription drugs, so Poremba advises checking labels on store-brand packages to make sure the doses and active ingredients are the same as what's in the brand names.

Tip 4: Watch out for drug interactions. With all the pills you may be taking - whether they're prescription brand-

counter medications, or less-regulated supplements like herbs, vitamins and minerals - it's important to look out for how they might interact or interfere with one another.

For instance, people taking aspirin or prescription blood-thinning drugs to cut their risk of a heart attack shouldn't take herbs that thin their blood, due to a risk of bleeding. And some antibiotics keep birth control pills from working. The lesson: ask your pharmacist if your pills might clash. Not every drug interaction is understood yet, but pharmacists are among the first to get a warning when a new one is found.

"The pharmacist plays an important role in safeguarding the patient when it comes to the prevention of drug interactions," says Poremba. "Another safeguard is to use the same pharmacy each time, because the pharmacist can better understand your medication regimen."

Find more on the World Wide Web:

- FDA Consumer Education: www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/DPAdefault.htm
- Pharmacist's guide to medication: www.safemedication.com
- National Council on Patient Information & Education: www.talkaboutour.org
- Consumer health information: www.drugdigest.org

MEDICAL DATEBOOK

ONGOING

Self-Help groups
Anyone seeking information on a variety of self-help groups may call the Michigan Self-Help Clearing House at (877) 717-5556.

Overeaters Anonymous
Support group for overeaters meets 7 p.m. every Friday at Providence Park-Novi, 47601 Grand River Avenue, Novi. Highline: (313) 438-HELP or (248) 474-9456.

Headache
Do you suffer from constant headaches? If so, join the Headache Foundation Support Group the first Wednesday of each month at Providence Northwestern Medical Center-Armington Hills, 30955 Northwestern, Farmington Hills. Call (248) 258-1973.

Alcoholics Anonymous
Everyone is welcome to the AA meetings held at noon every Tuesday and Thursday at Providence Medical Office Center-Novi, 39500 W. 10 Mile Road (at Hagerty), Novi. Call (248) 348-9362. AA meetings also held noon every Wednesday at Mission Health Medical Center-Livonia, 37595 Seven Mile Road, Livonia. Call (734) 953-1188.

Thyroid cancer
Thyroid Cancer Survivors Association, Inc. support group meets 7-8:30 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of each month at the Plymouth Public Library, 223 S. Main Street, downtown Plymouth, in the Gold Room. For more information about the ThyCa SE Michigan Support

Group, call Mary Rose at (734) 397-2901 or e-mail: SE_MiThyCa.org. For more information on thyroid cancer and our other free support services, visit www.thyca.org or call toll free (877) 586-7904.

AUGUST

Bereavement
"Together to Share," a grief support group, meets 10 a.m. the first Monday of each month at American House of Middlebelt Road in Livonia. Its next meeting is Monday, Aug. 5. The group also meets 3 p.m. the third Tuesday of the month at Dorvin Nursing Center on Middlebelt Road in Livonia. Both groups are facilitated by Biana Quilte, bereavement coordinator at Heartland Hospice in Southfield. Call (800) 770-9859.

Senior Health Day
Saint Joseph Mercy Senior Health Services will present a Senior Health Day 9-11:30 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 6, at SJM Health Stop, located in Birlwood Mall just off I-94 at the State Street exit in Ann Arbor. "Caring for Aging Skin: Changes, Problems and Prevention" will be the theme. Free skin screening of hands and face. Samples of healthy foods plus tree gifts. Call (734) 827-3777.

JAMES W. WILLIAMS, Attorney, 840 West Long Lake Road, Suite 300, Troy, Michigan 48068. STATE OF MICHIGAN PROBATE COURT COUNTY OF OAKLAND PUBLICATION NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Decedent's Trust Estate
Estate of ALFRED J. PETERS, Deceased. Social Security No. 391-20-9000. NOTICE TO CREDITORS
The decedent, Alfred J. Peters, who lived at 31240 Churchill Drive, Beverly Hills, Michigan 48025 and died June 15, 2002. There is no probate estate.
Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the Alfred J. Peters Trust Agreement dated December 11, 2001, will be forever barred unless presented to the Court by R. Peters, 31240 Churchill Drive, Beverly Hills, MI 48025, the named Successor Trustee within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.
GEOFFREY R. PETERS, 31240 Churchill Drive, Beverly Hills, MI 48025. Attorney: James W. Williams, 122332, 840 West Long Lake Road, Suite 300, Troy, MI 48068. Telephone Number: (248) 478-2700. Publish August 4, 2002.

CHEST

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"These events are devastating consequences of a broad spectrum of life activities, including many occurring during routine daily living," Maron says. "The projectiles are common in every day life and some of the blows can be very light."

Although the exact number of commotio cordis events is not known, they are rare, according to Maron. Public education and awareness within the lay and medical communities could prevent many of these catastrophes, he says.

While the victims had structurally normal hearts with no heart disease, the strikes occurred over the heart at a precise moment resulting in ventricular fibrillation, cardiac

arrest or sudden cardiac death. A strike at the "vulnerable" time of the heart cycle between beats can trigger an abnormal rhythm.

"Any blow to the chest, regardless of its intensity or velocity or force, is capable of producing cardiac arrest," says Maron.

KNOW CPR

The most effective treatment for cardiac arrest is quick CPR and defibrillation (using a defibrillator to deliver an electric shock to the heart). Survival is directly linked to the amount of time between the onset of sudden cardiac arrest and defibrillation. Chances of survival are reduced to about 7 percent to 10 percent with every minute of delay. Few attempts at resuscitation are successful

after 10 minutes. The American Heart Association believes thousands more cardiac arrest victims could be saved annually if more lay persons were trained in CPR.

Got an idea for a story?

E-mail us at jhubred@oe.hometown.com.net

Just because something is old doesn't mean it isn't valuable.

I can relate to that. Maybe that's why I'm never in a rush with these guys. Sanding out a dent here and there, restoring the gears... soon I'll have all the time in the world for them, just like they have for me. That's the beauty of retirement. And now that it's almost here, I'm grateful that I started planning early - with U.S. Savings Bonds. I started buying Savings Bonds when I got my first real job, through a Payroll Savings plan. I put aside something every payday. And little by little, it really added up. Bonds are guaranteed safe, too, and earn interest up to 30 years.

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CLARIFICATION

An incorrect e-mail address appeared in the July 28 health story, "Take the Challenge: Get healthy! Get Fit!" by Sandra Dalka-Przyby. You may e-mail Dalka-Przyby, a certified lifestyle and weight management consultant for the American Council on Exercise, at sdprzyby@hotmail.com. She will answer your questions and offer motivation and advice to help further your weight-loss endeavors.

Daniel Patrick

FOR OAKLAND COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT

Experience:

- Former Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor, Oakland Circuit Court Research Attorney and Assistant City Attorney.
- Currently as a private practice attorney handling Family Law, Criminal and Civil cases

Integrity and Dignity: A person of impeccable character with solid work ethic that will handle people in his court with dignity and compassion.

Common Sense: An experienced attorney who offers a common sense approach to Family Law.

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