Safe Medicine®
Protect Yourself from Medication Errors
The Institute for Safe Medication Practices
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Safety lessons from the one-hour photo shop

Have you ever watched people pick up their prints at a supermarket's one-hour photo counter? Chances are they eagerly open the bag, pull out the photos, and look them over closely to make sure they came out okay. Sadly, people spend more time checking their photos than their prescriptions. Most people pick up their prescription and leave the pharmacy without even opening the bag.

Did you know that it's a good idea to check the prescriptions your pharmacist has given you? Or maybe you know, but you don't feel comfortable doing it. After all, most of us are more familiar with photographs than with prescriptions. We know what a good print should look like, and we'll tell someone if we see a problem with the way our photos were developed. But we're not as familiar with our medicine, especially new prescriptions.

But not knowing about your medicine is just one problem. Taking medicine is simply not as enjoyable as reliving happy moments captured in photographs. People spend more time and energy on the things they enjoy. So, photos are examined while medications are not given as much attention.

We also trust the pharmacist to be the expert. We've rated pharmacists as one of the most trusted professionals. And when we trust someone, we often accept what he says and does without question.

> People spend more time checking their photos than they do checking their prescriptions.

The point is: You are an important factor in preventing errors. Yes, pharmacists deserve the trust we've placed in them. But a pharmacist, being human, could make a mistake. So could the doctor writing the prescription.

See page 2 for tips on how to check your prescriptions before leaving the pharmacy.

60 second safety tips

■ **Shellfish or iodine allergy?** Let your doctor, nurse, and X-ray technician know if you have an allergy to shellfish or iodine before you have an x-ray procedure that requires an injection of dye (contrast solution). This dye is sometimes used to make things more visible during procedures like a cardiac catheterization, a CT scan, or an MRI. If you are allergic to shellfish or iodine, your doctor may decide not to use the dye for the procedure. If dye is needed to make the procedure effective, a special type of dye may be used. You may also be given medicine that will reduce your chance of an allergic reaction to the dye.

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The Studies Show...

Ask about your medicine. Most people don't want to be "protected" from learning about the serious side effects of medicines. In a study of 2,500 adults who visited clinics, three out of four people wanted to be told about all the possible side effects of their medicine. And they believed that doctors were never justified in not telling them. Sadly, one out of every 250 people was not at all interested in learning about their medicines. How much information do you want? Let your doctor and pharmacist know if you feel you're not getting enough.

Speak up. For decades, doctors and nurses have been told to wash their hands before they touch a patient. But several years ago, a study found that patients could also play an important role in making sure this is done. Patients who were admitted to the hospital were told that handwashing stops the spread of infections. They were then encouraged to ask their nurses and doctors whether they had washed their hands. If they were hesitant to ask, stickers saying, "Did you wash your hands?" were given to them to wear on their gown. The study found a large increase (42%) in the amount of liquid soap used in the hospital — a sure sign of more handwashing. And patients developed fewer infections.

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▸ *Brand name medicines appear in green; generic medicines appear in red.*

Do you know...

...how to check your prescriptions?

Just as you check your prints at the one-hour photo counter, you should check your prescriptions at the pharmacy counter. The following guidelines will get you started.

1 When picking up a new prescription, ask the pharmacist at least one question about it. Here are some examples:

- ✓ "Is there anything special I should know about taking this medication?"
- ✓ "Does the information sheet you gave me have everything I need to know?
- ✓ "I'm allergic to _____. Should I take this medication?"
- ✓ "I'm also taking _____, which I got at another pharmacy. Can I take both safely?"

2 Every time you pick up a prescription, whether it's new or a refill:

- ✓ Take it out of the bag and read the label. Are your name and your doctor's name correct? Don't assume that any errors are just typing mistakes. A misspelled name could mean you have someone else's prescription.
- ✓ Read the directions on the label. Make sure it's what your doctor told you, and that you understand how much medicine to take and how many times a day you should take it.
- ✓ While you're still in the pharmacy, read the drug information sheet stapled to the bag to learn what the medicine is supposed to treat. Is that what you're being treated for? If not, it could signal an error, so check with your pharmacist.
- ✓ Read about the possible side effects. If you're picking up a refill and you realize that you've been having these side effects, tell the pharmacist immediately. He may want to call your doctor.
- ✓ If you're getting a refill, make sure the medicine looks the same as it did last time. If it looks different, ask the pharmacist about it. Most likely, the pharmacist has filled your prescription with a generic drug that looks different from what you're used to. But mistakes are possible, so check with the pharmacist to be sure.

Our thanks to Tony Grasha, PhD, Professor of Psychology, University of Cincinnati, for submitting "Safety lessons from the one-hour photo shop" and "Do you know... how to check your prescriptions?"

60 second safety tips continued

■ **Sore eyes.** Are you using eye drops to help relieve your sore eyes? If you overuse eye drops that contain decongestants (ingredients that shrink swollen blood vessels) such as naphazoline, tetrahydrozoline, or phenylephrine, it could lead to conjunctivitis - swollen, red, sore eyes with a liquid discharge. It could take weeks for this condition to clear up. Use your eye drops as directed on the label, or your red eyes may actually worsen.

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The Studies Show...

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Patients can help prevent mistakes with medicines, too. If you are hospitalized, nurses should always check your name bracelet when they bring you medicine. This is an important safety check, even if the nurse knows you. But, once in a while, nurses may forget, and an accident could happen. You could be given medicine intended for another patient. So always hold your arm out, show the nurse your name bracelet, and tell her your name each time she brings you medicine. And don't think that your nurse has forgotten you when she repeatedly asks you your name. It's just that your safety is important.

Reminder:

Get your flu shot. Check with your local hospital, pharmacy, or community group. Often, these places offer the flu shot free or for a small charge. Your insurance may cover it, too. The flu can cause serious illness in people, especially those with health conditions such as diabetes or heart disease. Remember, you'll be protecting yourself as well as others with whom you are in contact.

PHUNNY PHARM

"YOU HAVE NICOTINE PATCH SPOTTED FEVER."