



Using Medication:
If and as required!

Keep for future reference

Question 1

If you consider a medication you are currently taking, do you remember its possible side effects?

Medication is our ally in the fight against disease. However, medication can become a danger to our health, if misused. It is therefore important to use medication properly and to follow certain basic rules. Do you know what these rules are?

Medication is used to bring about a desired result (ease pain, prevent disease, treat a condition). However, most medication produce not just one but several effects. The unwanted outcomes caused by a product are referred to as side effects.

While some side effects are simply unpleasant (constipation, drowsiness or heartburn), others are more serious and may require the patient to discontinue using the medication.

To determine whether your symptoms are caused by the medication you are taking as opposed to a health problem, it is important for you to recognize the major side effects of your medication. If you are unfamiliar with these side effects, ask your health professional. You can exercise your role as an informed patient with this information in hand.

Question 2

Do you have any trouble understanding the instructions found on your medication's label?

All medication comes with instructions, which are located on the manufacturer's packaging or the pharmacist's label.

The instructions accompanying your medication are important. They explain what the medication is for (such as relieving pain or fever), the recommended dose, when to take it and any necessary precautions (take with meals, apply sparingly, etc.).

If the instructions are difficult to read or understand (due to your eyesight, damaged packaging or unfamiliarity with the terms used), ask your health professional to explain them. You can also request a personalized copy of these instructions adapted to your vision.

Question 3

Is it important to check the expiry date on your medication before taking it?

The expiry date for medication appears on the packaging or the pharmacist's label.

Products generally should not be used after their expiry date. It is also important to consider that despite an expiry date that has not yet lapsed, a product may no longer be effective due to the conditions in which it has been stored (for example, if kept in direct sunlight, exposed to too much humidity or frozen).

Although the expiry date does not guarantee the effectiveness of a product that has not been stored properly, it is nevertheless a good indication of when the product should be discarded. The best way to dispose of your old medication is to return it to the pharmacy, which will ensure it is discarded in a safe and environmentally friendly manner.

In certain exceptions, you can use some products for a short time after their expiry date has lapsed. In case of doubt, check with your health professional, who will let you know whether it is safe to use a product after its expiry date. Do not hesitate to call on his or her expertise!

Question 4

Do you think that doubling the prescribed dose of your medication will increase the product's effectiveness, without significant risk?

The instructions appearing on the label of prescribed medication explain how to take it (such as dose and frequency).

Doubling a dose may be dangerous. Your prescribed dose is based on your age, weight and state of health. By altering the dose, you could be increasing the side effects and dangers associated with certain products without, however, increasing their effectiveness.

If your medication is not providing relief or not acting fast enough, speak to your health professional. An alternative might be to improve the manner in which you are using the product without actually increasing the dose. Another possibility is that the medication requires a few days to produce a noticeable effect, or you may respond better to another drug.

Question 5

Why should certain medication not be chewed?

Some tablets seem too large to be swallowed easily. It may be tempting to chew or crush them to make taking them more manageable.

Some tablets are meant to be chewed, such as tablets for young children.

However, this is not the case for all tablets. Long-acting medication is designed to be absorbed gradually, which extends its duration of action. By chewing or crushing the medication, a dose intended to be released over several hours is instead released all at once. This increases your risk of taking too high a dose, which can cause unwanted or harmful effects. It is best not to chew a product if the instructions do not specify to do so.

If a tablet is too large or difficult for you to swallow, speak to your health professional. The medication may be available in a liquid or suppository form. Your health professional may also have some suggestions for making these products easier to take.

Question 6

Are antibiotics always necessary to be cured?

Antibiotics are drugs prescribed to fight certain types of infection. They are one of our most effective means for treating a number of illnesses.

Despite their strength and effectiveness against certain microbes, antibiotics are not a “one size fits all” solution. To be effective, they must be prescribed based on the type of infection and used according to specific instructions (taken at certain intervals, for a minimum number of days, etc.).

Your doctor may refuse to prescribe antibiotics if he or she determines that your illness will not respond to this type of medication. For instance, antibiotics have no effect on flu viruses.

By not prescribing unnecessary antibiotics, your doctor is actually protecting you from possible side effects and, more importantly, preventing the development of resistance to this antibiotic, making the drug ineffective if you really need it at a later date.

Aside from antibiotics, there may be other remedies for your condition. Ask your health professional about them.

Question 7

Why does your pharmacist not provide you with the quantity of medication you need for several months of treatment all at once?

Medication that must be taken regularly over the course of several months is often dispensed for a four-week period (with a few exceptions). This rule is in place for safety and economical reasons: storing large quantities of medication in a house with young children increases the risk of accidental poisoning; in addition, storage under improper conditions could lead to waste.

It is also possible that your treatment will be modified in the coming months, that your doctor will prescribe a new medication or that your state of health will change. For these reasons, it is usually considered a good idea to have enough medication available to last four weeks.

However, some exceptions do exist. If this is your case, talk to your pharmacist, who will help you assess your situation.

Question 8

If a friend tells you he or she is feeling unwell and you recognize the symptoms, should you give them medication if you have it on hand?

Many of us keep our medicine cabinets at home well stocked in case we get sick.

If a friend, relative or neighbour complains of a headache, upset stomach or insomnia, you may be tempted to try to provide relief by offering what you have available.

The effects of a medication obviously depend on the product but also on the person using it. Medication that works for you may be less effective or even dangerous for someone else, depending on that person's age, weight, sex, state of health and the other medication he or she is taking.

It is best to seek the advice of a health professional or to consult a doctor in serious or emergency situations.

Question 9

When a child is sick, can they be given the same medication as an adult?

One of the most upsetting and worrisome experiences for parents is when their children are sick. Do you have to see a doctor or pharmacist every time? What if you have adult medication at home that might work?

A child is not a miniature adult. Adult medication may not be suitable for your children.

Children's products are specifically tailored to the physiology of babies or young children and are designed to allow for an accurate determination of safe doses. You cannot do this by trying to cut up a tablet intended for an adult.

Many types of medication are even considered harmful to infants and young children. It is best to consult your health professional for specific and reliable advice.

Question 10

Under what circumstances should one use vitamins or dietary supplements?

The list of vitamins and dietary supplements available in pharmacies and specialty shops has never been as long as in the past few years.

There is no substitute for a healthy, balanced meal, and good health does not come in a bottle of tablets.

In certain cases, however, vitamins and dietary supplements are needed to correct a deficiency in vitamins, minerals or other products generally contained in sufficient quantities in food.

If you are not eating properly, a better solution might be to seek help from a dietician or review your diet and eating habits.

Question 11

Is the medication sold on the Internet a good deal or is it risky to buy online?

Many Websites offer prescription medication and over-the-counter drugs at tempting prices.

Medication safety and quality standards are not the same all over the world. In Québec, strict regulations govern the sale and distribution of products sold as medication. The kinds of standards in force in Canada and Québec do not necessarily apply in other countries, which means that buying medication online can be dangerous.

Medication is not like other consumer products. Its use must be assessed based on the person who is going to be taking it. Remote assessment is impossible in this type of situation.

For these reasons, the sale of medication online is considered a risky practice. It is a matter of your life and health. What risks are you willing to take? Talk to your health professional if you want to know more.

Question 12

When your doctor prescribes you a new medication, is it important to tell him or her what else you are already taking?

A walk-in appointment, a trip to the ER, a visit with your family doctor, an examination by a specialist ... in all of these cases you see a doctor who must determine your health needs and if necessary prescribe the appropriate solution for your condition.

As far as your doctor, pharmacist and other health professionals are concerned, you are the best source of information regarding the medication you are taking. This information is vital because it will prevent the doctor from prescribing something you are already taking and ensure that you are not given something that will interfere with your other medication.

Whenever you see your doctor, it is a good idea to bring along an updated list of the medication you have been taking in the past few months (including prescription medication and over-the-counter drugs). Your pharmacist can help you complete this list or provide you with a written copy. This is one of the advantages of buying all of your medication at the same pharmacy. You and your health professionals will therefore be working together with your well-being in mind.

Question 13

If you need to know the effects of a medication that may suit your health needs, who would you consult?

You have just seen an ad in a magazine or on television describing health problems that are similar to yours. The ad was for medication that might work for you. Where can you learn more about it?

Health professionals have specific training in medication-assisted treatments. They keep their knowledge up to date and frequently confer with other specialists. It is their duty to protect your health. Their opinions are based primarily on experience and on scientifically proven facts.

Patients who have been taking a certain medication for a long time are very familiar with its effects. However, their knowledge is based on their own experience. There is no guarantee that what works for them will work for you. They are valuable sources of information, but they are not experts.

A great deal of health-related information is also available on the Internet. Nevertheless, you should exercise caution because the value and reliability of this type of information varies significantly. Information obtained online should be verified with health professionals.

Question 14

In Québec, are you required to be covered by a prescription drug insurance plan or can you opt out?

The Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec administers the public prescription drug insurance plan. Several other group insurance plans or benefit plans provide medication coverage as well.

Since 1997, everyone in Québec must be covered by a prescription drug insurance plan. This means that all Québec residents, regardless of their financial situation, are able to obtain the prescription drugs they need.

Two different types of plans cover prescription drugs: private plans (group insurance plans or benefit plans) and the public plan administered by the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec. Which one should you choose?

If you have access to a private plan, you are required to join it. You may be eligible for this type of plan in several ways, such as through your job, a professional order or association you belong to or your spouse. If you have no access to a private plan, you are required to register with the Régie's public plan.

Persons ages 65 and over who still have access to a private plan that offers protection equivalent to that provided by the public plan are the only exception. They have the option of maintaining their private coverage or choosing the public plan instead.

Question 15

Are those covered for prescription drugs by a private group insurance plan at work, required to extend coverage to their family members, that is, their spouse and children?

In the area of prescription drug insurance, close to 60% of the Québec population is covered by a private group insurance plan. This type of plan is generally offered by their employer.

Everyone under the age of 65 who has access to a private group insurance plan must join it. They are required to obtain coverage for their family members, that is, their spouse and children, at least as far as prescription drug coverage is concerned. Most of the time, medication coverage is included in a plan covering other forms of health care (called a health insurance plan), but it can be offered on its own.

If you are eligible for a private plan through your job, profession or usual occupation, you are required to join it and obtain coverage for your spouse and children as well, unless they are already insured under another private plan. In this case, you and your spouse can opt to join your respective private plans separately, or you can both join the same private plan.

Conclusion

**As you can see,
the proper use
of medication depends
on many little things
that are under
your control, which means
you can act ...
if and as required!**

Produced by:

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G1S 2M1

This document is available in the "Documentation" section of the Website of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, at the following address: www.msss.gouv.qc.ca.

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Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2004

National Library of Canada, 2004

ISBN 2-550-43179-0

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