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Drug Information: where safe medication use starts

To make the best use of the medication you or your family members take, you need to be well informed. There is plenty of information available on drugs and healthcare products, but the quality varies widely. Some Internet sources are misleading, and others might not give the answer which is suited to your needs. Here are some suggestions to get you started on learning about safe medication use.



Asking questions

When looking for drug information the first place to start is with your pharmacist or doctor. Pharmacists are easily accessible and are recognized as medication experts. They can help with your questions about both prescription and non-prescription drugs. They also have a professional responsibility to counsel patients on the proper use of medications.

When receiving a prescription medicine there are a number of questions you can ask. These include:

- What is the name of this drug?
- What is it for? Why should I take it?
- How often is it taken?
- What are the side effects? What should I do if I have a side effect?
- Are there interactions with other drugs, herbal products, vitamins or foods?
- How long should I take it? Can I stop the drug if I feel better?

More information about what your pharmacist can do for you is available at [The College of Pharmacists of British Columbia](#) and the [British Columbia Pharmacy Association](#).



After hours, if your doctor or regular pharmacist is not available, many pharmacies are open late and pharmacists are able to answer your questions. Otherwise, from 5 p.m. until 9:00 a.m., BC residents can be put in touch with a pharmacist by calling the BC NurseLine. This service is available by calling 604-215-4700 or 1-866-215-4700 for those calling from outside the lower mainland.



Drug information on the Internet

There are plenty of sources for information on individual drugs, but many have commercial purposes, and can therefore be biased. Finding balanced and trustworthy information on Canadian drug products can be a particular challenge.

Canadian drug information:

The BC Health Guide has a wide range of information on many health issues. You can access their “Medication Library” which discusses how a medication works, precautions, side effects, interactions, and more. You can search for information by brand name or generic name.

Information from elsewhere:

Reliable drug information can also be found at Medline Plus, which is a service of the National Library of Medicine in the United States. This site also features health-related news stories.

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