

Pre-Reading Discussion: How do you know what a medication might do to you if you take it? How do you know if you have an allergy to a medication? What do you do if a medication makes you sicker?

This passage is about a guy named Jack who discovers how important it is to understand the labels on over-the-counter drugs. He has taken ibuprofen, (commonly called Motrin and Advil) many times before, but this time is different.

Jack was helping his buddy Carl move to a new apartment.

Carl had a huge TV set. Jack picked it up by himself. It was super heavy. He took a few steps, but then he felt it slipping from his arms. Jack strained to hold on to it. He groaned as he bent over to lower the TV down to the floor.

“That was not good. I think I just hurt my back,” Jack told Carl. “Do you have any Motrin?”

“I think so. Let me look,” said Carl. He came back with two bottles. He was reading the labels.

“Hmmmm. This one says, ‘Use before March 06.’ That’s past the expiration date.” He threw the bottle in the trash. “But you’re in luck! This one is still good.” Carl tossed the other bottle to Jack. “I’ll get you a glass of water.”

Jack took two tablets. He hoped his back was not too badly hurt. “Hey, how about a break, Carl? Let’s have a beer,” he said.

“Not a good plan, dude. You just took Motrin, so you should avoid alcohol. Read the label, man. But you’re in luck. I just happen to have one bottle of non-alcoholic beer left. And, since the TV is still here, let’s see what the score is in the game.”

They sat down to relax for about half an hour. Then something odd happened. Jack started to feel itchy. His skin broke out in a red, bumpy rash all over. His face felt hot. It was starting to get puffy. “Hey Carl, look at this!” said Jack.

Carl looked at Jack. “That is not good, man,” he said. “Where is that bottle of Motrin?”

“In my pocket. Why?” asked Jack.

Carl grabbed the bottle. He looked on the label and read the side effects.

“Looks like you are having an allergic reaction to Motrin. It says to seek medical help right away.”

“But I’ve taken this stuff many times before,” said Jack.

“That doesn’t matter,” said Carl. “Do you know a doctor?”

Jack had a card in his wallet from the clinic where he went for a work injury last year. He called the number and talked to the nurse.

“An allergic reaction can go from mild to severe very quickly,” the nurse said. “How is your breathing? Any wheezing?”

“Not so far,” said Jack, “but my lips are a little numb.”

“Do you have any antihistamines?” asked the nurse.

Jack asked Carl. Carl shook his head. “No we don’t,” said Jack.

“Don’t take any chances,” the nurse told Jack. “Call 911 if you start to have any problems breathing. Can someone drive you to the nearest E.R.?”

“Yes, my friend can drive me. The E.R. is a just few miles from here,” said Jack.

“I would advise you to go right now. Bring the medicine bottle with you to show the doctor. And don’t take any more,” the nurse said.

“You don’t have to worry about that!” said Jack. By now he was getting very itchy. “Thanks for your help. We’re on our way.”

“Some people will do anything to get out of work,” joked Carl. Then he started the car and headed for the hospital.

Questions for Discussion:

Can you relate to Jack's experience?

Have you ever had an allergic reaction to something? What were the symptoms? What did you do?

Do you read medicine labels? What would you do if you didn't fully understand them?

Did you know that you can become allergic to something even if you have never reacted to it before?