

Section 6: Drug Use

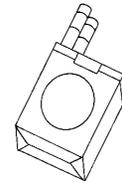
Preventive health care means more than getting regular checkups by a doctor and a dentist. It also means making good decisions about your health. To do that, you need to know when drugs are safe and when they are dangerous.

Drug Use

Major *drug groups* often include *tobacco*, *alcohol*, prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, and *illegal drugs*. Drug use can change how your body works. For example, if you take some medications, then you may become sleepy. Drug use can also change how a person acts. For example, you are taking some over-the-counter medication to help you lose weight, but the medicine is also making you feel very sad. You feel sad all the time, even when you don't have a reason to feel sad.

Most drugs (tobacco, alcohol, prescription medications, and over-the-counter medications) are legal in the United States. Some drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, are illegal in the United States.

Tobacco. People smoke tobacco (in cigarettes, pipes, and cigars) and chew tobacco. Health professionals say that tobacco may cause cancer. If you are using tobacco now, try to use it less or quit. Health professionals also say that pregnant women should not use any tobacco.



Tobacco smoke does not hurt just the smoker. It is harmful to anyone who breathes it, especially children. This is another reason to quit smoking and to stay away from tobacco smoke.

Alcohol. For many people, *moderate drinking of alcohol* is not dangerous. Moderate drinking means no more than 1 drink each day for women and no more than 2 drinks each day for men. The drink sizes for moderate drinking are 12 oz. (ounces) of regular beer, 5 oz. of wine, and 1.5 oz. of 80-proof alcohol. 80-proof alcohol includes whiskey, vodka, rum and gin.



Alcohol use might be a problem if you drink more than a moderate amount. Pregnant women should never drink alcohol. People who think they might have a drinking problem should ask themselves the following questions about alcohol. If they answer yes to any of these questions, they should talk to a health professional to get help.

- Have I ever felt that I should drink less alcohol?
- Have I ever felt bad about my drinking alcohol?
- Have people ever said that I drink too much alcohol? If so, did I feel angry when they told me that?
- Have I ever had a drink of alcohol first thing in the morning to feel better?

Prescription Medications. A health professional must prescribe all prescription medications. A prescription is a special form the health professional fills out and signs. A health professional can also call a pharmacist to give a prescription over the phone. A pharmacist must have a prescription before selling you prescription medication.



A health professional prescribes a medication for one person to help with a certain problem. You should not share prescription medications with anyone. You should tell health professionals about all the over-the-counter and prescription medications you are taking when they are giving you a new prescription. Health professionals need to know all the medications you are taking. It's a good idea to take your medical history form. The medications you are taking should be written on this form.

Over-the-Counter Medications. Anyone can buy over-the-counter medications. You don't need a prescription from a health professional to buy them. Often it helps to ask a health professional or a pharmacist about which medications to buy.



Prescription and over-the-counter medications have written warnings, information and dosage directions on the *medication container*, the *medication label* or on a separate piece of paper. It can be dangerous to your health if you don't understand what is written about prescription and over-the-counter medications.

Medication warnings might tell you

- not to take too much medication.
- not to use the medication if you are pregnant or nursing a baby.
- not to take a medication if you already have a specific health problem. For example, people who have high blood pressure should not take some medications for colds because they can make your blood pressure go higher.
- not to take a medication if you are using certain medications. For example, if you are taking an over-the-counter allergy medication you should not be taking MAOI drugs. MAOI drugs are prescription medications that treat emotional conditions and other health problems.

Medication information will tell you

- what to do if you take too much medication.
- about *side effects*. Side effects are what some medications can do to you. For example, some medications can make you vomit, give you diarrhea or make it hard for you to fall asleep. Some side effects can be from allergies. For example, after one day of taking a medication, you may get a rash. If you think you have an allergy to a medication, you should stop taking the medication and call your doctor right away.



- an *expiration date*. An expiration date tells you how long you can keep the medication. After the expiration date, you should throw the medication out and not take it.
- what is dangerous to do while using a medication. For example, some medications make you sleepy. The instructions will tell you not to drive a car while using the medication. Other instructions may tell you not to drink alcohol while you are using a medication.

Medication dosage directions tell you

- the dosage you can take. The dosage is how much of the medication to take and how often to take the medication. For example, the dosage is to put 2 drops of medication in each eye 2 times a day.
- how to take medication. For example, you take some pills on an empty stomach, which means taking the pills 1 hour before eating or 2 hours after eating.
- how long to take medication. For example, if the directions for pain medication are to “Take the medicine as needed,” then you will take the medication only when the pain is very bad. If the directions are “Take 3 pills a day for 10 days,” then you must take the medication for the full 10 days, even if you feel better after 4 days.



If you don't understand the medication's written warnings, information and dosage directions, you should ask the pharmacist or your health professional.