



Consumers Can Help Prevent
Harmful Medication Incidents

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When It Comes to Your Medicines, Don't Rely on Memory!

To make good decisions about your care, your healthcare providers need accurate information. That's why it's best not to rely on your memory when providing information about the medicines you are taking. Reports received by SafeMedicationUse.ca show how relying on memory can lead to mistakes.

In one incident, a consumer had received a prescription from a psychiatrist for the antidepressant medicine citalopram, at a dose of 30 mg per day. Unfortunately, when asking a family doctor for a refill, the consumer relied on memory and said that the dose was 45 mg daily. The family doctor thought the dose seemed high and wrote a prescription for 40 mg daily. After the consumer had the prescription filled and started taking the higher dose, some side effects occurred. Eventually, the psychiatrist who had written the original prescription identified the mistake. When the dose was reduced to the correct amount, the consumer experienced some additional unpleasant effects.

In another incident, a consumer called a pharmacy to request a refill but did not refer to the prescription bottle for the name of the medicine and the prescription number. Instead, the consumer relied on memory and asked for a medicine taken in the past to treat a different condition. Even though it had been over a year since the consumer had taken the requested medicine, the pharmacy contacted the consumer's doctor and got approval to dispense it. Fortunately, when picking up the medicine, the consumer checked the prescription and noticed the mistake.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following advice to help consumers reduce their chances of being harmed by mistakes like the ones described above:

- We've said it before, but it bears repeating. Keep a list of your medicines and how you use them! Be sure to update the list whenever there is any change in your medicines.
- Never rely on your memory when providing information to healthcare providers about your medicines. Instead, take your list of medicines with you every time you seek medical care and show the list to each healthcare provider. If you are speaking with a healthcare provider by telephone, be sure to check the list or your prescription bottles for details of your medicines.
- When requesting a refill of a prescription, provide more than one detail about the medicine. For example, give the name of the medicine and the most recent prescription number, or the name of the medicine and the reason you are taking it.
- When having prescriptions filled or picking up refills, always check every medicine bottle or package before you leave the pharmacy. Tell a member of the pharmacy staff if you have any concerns.

In a US study conducted in emergency departments in the year 2000, only 48% of patients could remember all of their medicines or could produce a list or the actual bottles. Only 39% knew the times when they took their medicines, and only 24% knew all the dosages.

Vilke GM, Marino A, Iskander, J Chan TC. Emergency department patient knowledge of medications. *The Journal of Emergency Medicine*. 2000;19(4):327-330. DOI: 10.1016/S0736-4679(00)00257-2.

For more information on keeping a list of your medicines and on checking your prescriptions, see our [medication safety tips](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_safepractices.html) at http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_safepractices.html and our article about [keeping a list of medicines](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/medication_list.html) at http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/medication_list.html.