



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

## SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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### Incident Reported with Cold and Flu Product

Choosing a nonprescription medicine can be complicated. Many different products are available to treat similar symptoms. Some products contain more than one ingredient, and some products even contain more than one type of tablet within the same package. For example, some cold and flu products contain different tablets for daytime and nighttime use. Each type of tablet contains ingredients that will help relieve cold and flu symptoms. However, the ingredients in the nighttime medicine can help with sleep, while the ingredients in the daytime medicine do not cause drowsiness. Confusing these tablets could lead to the opposite of the intended effect. It might sound trivial, but a mistake like this could cost you more than a night's sleep. For example, taking a nighttime cold and flu product during the day could affect your ability to drive.



SafeMedicationUse.ca recently received a report that highlights the potential for confusion when a nonprescription product contains more than one type of medicine in the same package. A consumer purchased a cold and flu product that was sold as a combination package, with separate blister packs of medicine intended for daytime and nighttime use. One blister pack contained green tablets (intended for daytime) and the other blister pack contained white tablets (intended for nighttime).

At bedtime, the consumer took what was believed to be the nighttime tablet to help with sleep, but had difficulty sleeping. This affected the consumer's work productivity the following day. The consumer realized later that the tablet taken the previous evening had been one of the daytime tablets. The consumer commented, "When we are sick and unable to think clearly, we may automatically assume that green pills are for nighttime and bright white pills are for daytime."

# Combination packs may offer convenience for consumers, but care is needed to avoid mix-ups.

## SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following recommendations for consumers:

- Always read the label of the original package carefully before taking any medicine.
- Store all medicines in their original packaging, so that dosing and safety information will stay with the medicine. This is especially important when the package contains more than one type of medicine.
- Before taking medicine from a combination package, check the package and instructions to be sure you can match each medicine with its intended use.
- Do not rely on colour or appearance alone to identify your medicines.
- Do not assume that the colour of your medicine has any connection with the intended use of the medicine or the time when it is to be taken. Read more about keeping medicines in their original packaging: [www.safemedicationuse.ca/alerts/alerts\\_packaging.html](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/alerts/alerts_packaging.html)

## Tips for Practitioners:

- Remind consumers of the importance of keeping all medicines in the original packaging.
- When recommending a medicine that is sold in a combination package, go over the reasons for use of each medicine and when to take it.



## Medication Safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts

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