How to steer clear of mistakes

Most of us take some type of medicine, whether prescribed by a doctor or bought over-the-counter (OTC). Drugs can help us live more comfortably with pain. They can also help ease the signs of short-term and ongoing sickness. But medicine can become a problem if not taken the right way. Mistakes with drugs can happen at home, your doctor’s office, the drugstore or the hospital.

An Unhealthy Dose

Unplanned problems caused by taking medicine the wrong way are on the rise. Reports show that drug overdose, mostly from certain pain medications ordered by doctors, cause 93 percent of unintended poisoning deaths. To stay safe when taking medicine, consider these tips:

- Know what you take and keep a list of the names and the doses. Write down drugs that are ordered by the doctor, OTC drugs, and supplements and herbs.
- Always take medicine as prescribed and don’t share with others.
- Take your medicine in good lighting to make sure you get the right dose.
- Take your medicine list to doctor visits to make sure you don’t mix drugs that react badly with other things you’re taking.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about any known side effects from the drugs you are taking.
- Keep drugs in the holder they came in.
- Throw away drugs that you no longer need or that have passed the date they are still good.
- Be in charge of all drugs used for children and teens.

The best cure for mistakes is making sure you always follow orders when taking medicines.
Keeping children safe from medication errors or mishaps

Parents want to protect their children. Making sure they are safe when they take medicine is part of that role. But small children who are unsupervised may get hold of drugs and mistake them for candy or juice. This can lead to children taking things that can hurt them. Nearly 53,000 children less than 5 years old visit the emergency room each year because of taking drugs by accident. Parents and caregivers can lower the chances of problems by:

• Giving children drugs only when needed
• Buying drugs with child-proof caps
• Storing drugs out of reach of children
• Making sure to follow the orders on the container
• Using the right size measuring tool, either the one that came with the drug or buying one from the drugstore
• Checking to be sure your child isn’t taking more than one drug with the same active ingredient and talking to the doctor if this occurs
• Calling your pharmacist or doctor if you are unsure of how to give the medicine
• Keeping the poison control number, 800-222-1222, within easy reach and saving it on your cell phone

A Word on Cough and Cold Drugs

Over-the-counter drugs that ease your child’s cough and cold are easy to buy. But be warned. Drug makers have changed their labels in recent years due to safety worries. The new labeling says that cough and cold medicines should not be given to children under 4 years old.

Always be careful. Read the label and follow the directions when giving your child a cough or cold drug. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for tips on how to safely handle your child’s cold.