

# Using Medicines Wisely

**M**edicines can do a great deal of good. You may be familiar with some positive effects medicines can have. They can also cause harm if they are used unwisely. In this lesson, you will examine ways of getting the greatest benefit from medicines and minimizing risks in their use.

## HEALTH TERMS

**prescription medicines**

**over-the-counter (OTC) medicines**

**medicine misuse**

## HEALTH CONCEPTS

- Using medicines wisely includes learning how to read medicine labels and using medicines as prescribed or intended by the manufacturer.
- Medicine misuse is using medicine in a way other than that for which it was intended.



DATE 11/12/57  
 TAC 106 Uem  
 Dop 159 Uem  
 Apply Q120 to  
 Skin small amount  
 only

Refill \_\_\_\_\_ times

DO NOT SUBSTITUTE

To ensure brand name dispensing, check and initial box.



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## Medicine Safety

**T**o minimize risks from medicines for the American public, the federal government has established a system for testing and approving new medicines. In the United States all medicines must meet standards set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before being approved and made available to the public.

## Testing and Approving New Medicines

The FDA requires a manufacturer of medicines to supply information about a medicine's chemical composition, intended use, effects, and possible side effects. Before a medicine is approved by the FDA, it undergoes a step-by-step testing process that can last from six to ten years. By federal law, a medicine must be both safe and medically

effective. Safety is usually established through tests. The effectiveness of a medicine is proved through tests on groups of healthy and ill patients.

## Release to the Public

One function of the FDA is to determine how medicine should be released to the public. There are two ways in which this can be done:

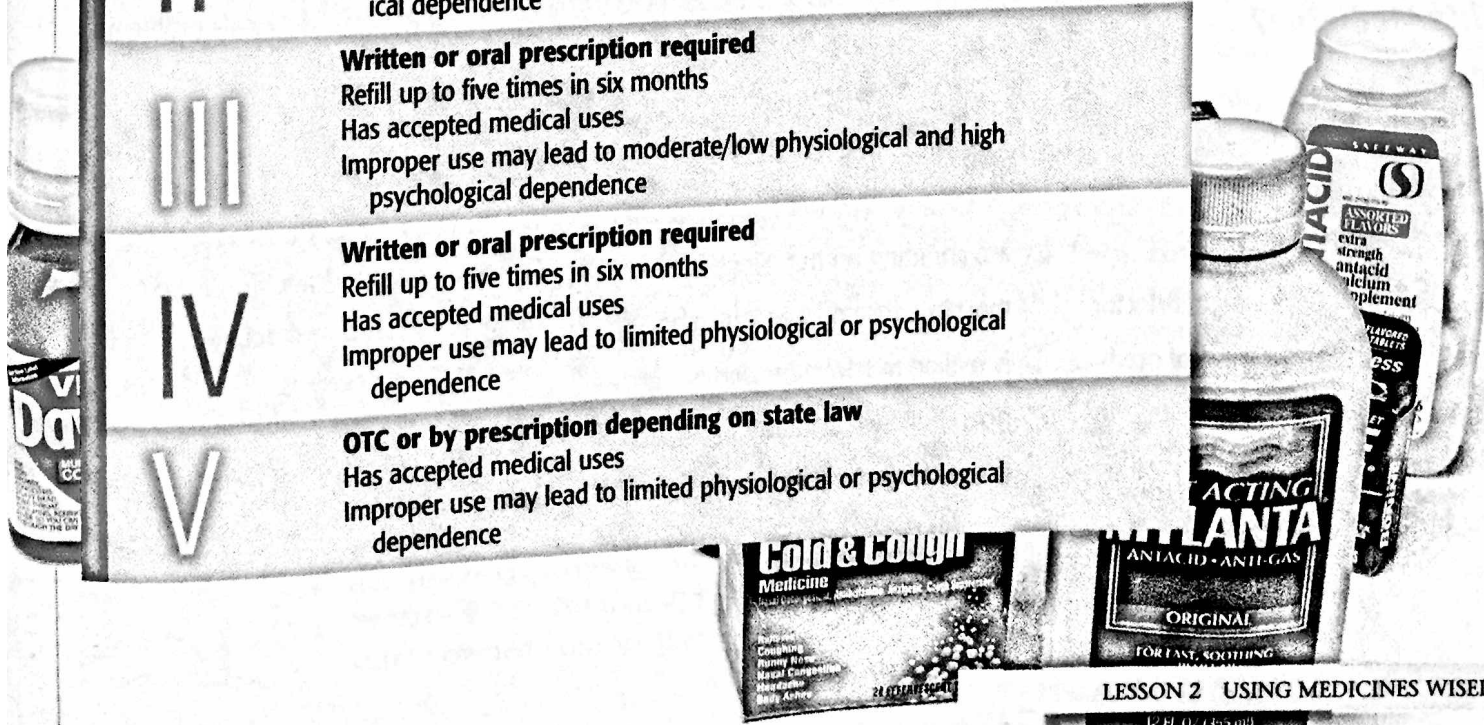
- **Prescription medicines.** Because of their strength and potential for harm, the FDA has ruled that there are some *medicines that cannot be used safely without the written approval of a licensed physician.* These **prescription medicines** are available only by means of a doctor's written instructions to a pharmacist to give specific amounts of a certain medicine to a patient. Only a physician can prescribe such medicines, and only a licensed pharmacist can dispense them.

## THE CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES ACT

The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970—commonly called the Controlled Substances Act—classifies medicines for use in the United States into five categories, or schedules, according to their use and potential for abuse.

SCHEDULE	USE OF MEDICINE
I	<b>Illegal and not prescribable</b> No current accepted medical use in United States Improper use may lead to severe physiological and psychological dependence
II	<b>Written prescription required</b> No prescription refills allowed Severe restrictions on medical use Improper use may lead to serious physiological and/or psychological dependence
III	<b>Written or oral prescription required</b> Refill up to five times in six months Has accepted medical uses Improper use may lead to moderate/low physiological and high psychological dependence
IV	<b>Written or oral prescription required</b> Refill up to five times in six months Has accepted medical uses Improper use may lead to limited physiological or psychological dependence
V	<b>OTC or by prescription depending on state law</b> Has accepted medical uses Improper use may lead to limited physiological or psychological dependence

▼ **When choosing OTC medicines, be certain to read and follow package directions.**





## Medicine Safety at Home

All medicines can be dangerous if misused. These guidelines can help make the medicines in your home safer:

- Never place medicine in an unlabeled vial or other container. Keep it in the container in which it was originally packaged.
- Store medicines in a safe place out of the reach of children.
- If there is a child in the house, never disable or tamper with the child-resistant cap on a medicine container.
- Throw away any medicines that have passed their expiration date. Some medicines merely lose their effectiveness with age. Others can become dangerous.

- **Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.** Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines include a wide variety of *medicines you can buy without a doctor's prescription*. These medicines can be purchased in pharmacies, supermarkets, and other stores that sell medicines. Although the FDA considers it safe to use these medicines without medical supervision, they still have the potential of being harmful if not used as directed.

## Medicine Misuse

There are many controls—both federal and state—on medicines, but there are still risks and responsibilities when it comes to their use. **Medicine misuse** is *using a medicine in a way other than the one intended*. Examples of medicine misuse include:

- giving your prescription medicine to someone else.
- taking too much or too little of a medicine.
- taking someone else's medicine.
- discontinuing use of a medicine without informing one's doctor.
- taking medicine for a longer period of time than was prescribed.
- mixing medicines.

If you suspect that someone you know is guilty of medicine misuse, urge that person to speak immediately with his or her health care professional or pharmacist. If the person refuses to seek help, discuss the situation with a responsible adult.



## Labeling

When the FDA approves a medicine, it is saying that the medicine is safe when used as directed. FDA approval also means that a medicine is effective in treating the illness or condition for which it was prescribed. The FDA requires manufacturers to include certain information on every prescription label, including the name of the prescribing doctor, patient's name, name and address of the pharmacy, date prescription was filled, prescription number, whether refills are allowed, and any special instructions. The illustration below shows basic information that must appear on every OTC medicine label.

▼ **The FDA governs the advertising and labeling of OTC medicines.**

**ACTIVITY Analyze why FDA officials might feel that regulation of advertising and package labels is necessary.**

