

How to identify tampering Cortisone cream treats skin allergy

POLLY'S POINTERS



POLLY FISHER

By Polly Fisher

DEAR READERS — News stories about over-the-counter medications that have been tampered with, resulting in accidental poisoning of unsuspecting consumers, are always scary. The chances that any one package you buy has been tampered with are extremely small but it is still wise to check all packaging carefully. Here are the things to check when buying medications. (Obviously, many of these also apply to food packages. If any of these signs are present, return the package to your retailer.)

Packages:

- Are there bits of paper or glue on the rim of the container, indicating that it once had a bottle seal?
- Are there breaks, cracks or holes in the outer wrapping or in the protective cover or seal?
- Does the outer covering appear to have been disturbed, unwrapped or replaced?
- Does a plastic or other shrink band around the top of a bottle appear distorted or stretched, as though it had been rolled down and then put back into place? Is the seal missing? Has the band been slit and retaped?
- Is the cap on an unsealed container loose?
- Liquids:**
- Are there particles in the bottom of the bottle or floating in the solution?
- Is the liquid cloudy although it normally is clear?
- Does it have a strange or different

odor (for example, like bleach, acid, gasoline or another pungent, sharp smell)?

- Is there any sign of a broken or removed seal?

Tablets:

• Has their appearance changed? For example, is the color different? Do they have unusual spots?

- Do the tablets have a strange or different odor or taste?
- Do the tablets differ in size or thickness?

• If imprinted, is the imprint missing from some tablets or is it different in some?

Capsules:

• Are they cracked or dented? • Do they have their normal shiny appearance, or are some dull and show signs that they have been handled?

- If sealed, is the seal intact?
- If imprinted, is the imprint missing from some?

• Are any of a different size or color?

• Do the capsule contents appear to be of differing amounts?

• Are the capsules of different lengths?

• Do they have an unexpected or unusual odor?

Tubes and jars (ointments, creams, pastes, etc.): Check the bottom as well as the top of a tube, especially if it is a metal tube crimped up from the bottom like a toothpaste tube. Are there any breaks or holes?

• Are ointments or creams gritty? Have they separated?

Naturally, you cannot be suspicious of every product you buy — I don't want you to see dragons lurking around every corner! But a common-sense awareness of the signs of tampering will let you judge at a glance if a package or medication has been tampered with; noting any irregularity should lead you to a closer inspection of the item. Again, if any package shows signs of having been tampered with in any way, return it to your retailer. — POLLY

DR. GOTT



PETER GOTT, M.D.

By Peter H. Gott, M.D.

DEAR DR. GOTT: In September 1984, a tube of Diprosone cream 0.05 percent cost \$4.35. My prescription was renewed this week for \$17.59. This is the best medication I've found for sealing cuts, so I shouldn't complain. But it gives an example of the horrendous increase in drug costs. Is there a generic available at a more reasonable cost?

DEAR READER: Cortisone creams, of which Diprosone is a particularly good brand, are available in less expensive, non-prescription, generic forms. Ask your pharmacist to recommend one.

You should never use cortisone creams to treat cuts. The medicine retards healing and encourages infec-

tion. Cortisone is appropriately used for allergic skin reactions, such as contact dermatitis, or for skin disorders, such as eczema.

It's best to treat cuts, scrapes and abrasions with gentle soap-and-water washing. Then leave the area uncovered to permit rapid healing. Use a sterile dressing only if there is bleeding or if there is risk the lesion may become dirty or continually injured.

DEAR DR. GOTT: Can you tell me where I can obtain a list of gluten-free foods? I'm at a loss at what to serve my new daughter-in-law who has a wheat-flour allergy.

DEAR READER: Read labels. Those foods made with wheat flour, which normally contains gluten, are best avoided. Many specialty shops and supermarkets carry gluten-free foods; the store manager can direct you to the appropriate display. Also, you may be able to find cookbooks for gluten-sensitive patients; these publications give helpful tips on how to prepare nutritious, gluten-free meals. Check with your local library or bookstore.

In general, gluten-sensitive patients can safely eat other starches,

such as potatoes, rice and corn. Rice flour is a palatable substitute for wheat flour.

DEAR DR. GOTT: My dermatologist tells me I should have a mole removed from my leg. It's about 1/4 inch in diameter, and I've had it all my life. Should I mess with it if it's not giving me any problems?

DEAR READER: As a general rule, people do not have to part with moles that have been present since childhood, unless the moles darken, bleed or change in configuration. However, in your case, I believe you should follow your dermatologist's advice because, as a specialist, he or she knows which skin lesions look benign and which are questionable. For example, moles called dysplastic nevi may appear harmless to the untrained eye, yet they could herald the development of a future malignancy.

Removal of a small mole from your leg is a simple office procedure that is relatively painless and free of complications. If your dermatologist urges removal, do it; the peace of mind is well worth the expense and slight inconvenience.

Foster parenting is rewarding

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training session put on by the CAS. They met other foster parents, took part in role playing in which they had the opportunity to put themselves in the place of a foster child, and were also told of the "horror stories."

"The training session was very good. The CAS didn't try to paint a rosy picture," said Mr. Antonini.

For the most part the Antonini's haven't experienced any real trouble as foster parents. The only trouble they did encounter was from one of their foster children who was the same age as their twin daughter. "It was awkward because the three saw each other 24 hours a day, something that would be hard for

anybody," Ms. Antonini said. And especially since at that age, when kids are competitive and tend to hang out in cliques, Mr. Antonini added.

For this reason the Antonini's have decided to be foster parents for children younger than their own. They wouldn't have teenagers because they have no experiences with them, they said.

Ms. Antonini said when there have been problems, their CAS social worker has always been ready to help. "He has come to our house on several occasions to talk to us as a group about how problems can be solved. It has been really helpful," she said.

The key to success, says Mr. Antonini, is to "tackle problems immediately. If you let them build up they'll get out of hand."

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