

Side effects of medication can prove hazardous

Modern prescription and "over-the-counter" drugs have revolutionized our attitude to health and medicine. They have become so much a part of the average health regime, most people never think about the health and safety hazards associated with careless or improper usage.

Drowsiness, blurred vision, loss of co-ordination, confusion - drugs can have subtle but severely debilitating effects.

For example, Health and Welfare Canada warns that ASA (aspirin) reacts unfavourably with any one of 20 other drugs. Just because a drug is available without a prescription doesn't mean it's innocuous, particularly when combined with other non-prescription or prescription medications and certain foods.

Alcohol should never be combined with medication as it can exaggerate the effects of the drug.

Too often people don't find out from their doctor or pharmacist how drugs should be taken and what combinations of medication can cause problems. Serious injuries can occur while completing normal household tasks, such as slicing vegetables or using power tools; a driving accident can result from only a moment's drowsiness.

"In most cases, it would be extremely difficult to determine if a traffic accident occurred because of the effects of medication," says Linden Rees, Ontario Claims Consultant for the Wellington Insurance. "The effects need to be very slight - slowed reaction time, momentary drowsiness

- to be fatal, particularly when travelling at night at high speeds or in poor weather conditions."

Some medications - those containing codeine - for example - carry specific warnings against driving or operating machinery. "It is possible," says Linden, "that a driver could be convicted of impaired driving and insurance coverage denied if the warning was ignored and an accident resulted." Routine testing for the presence of medication in accident victims would be far too costly, though, explains Linden.

"The only safeguard is to raise people's awareness of the possible dangers to themselves," says Linden. To accomplish this, Wellington Insurance has produced and distributed a flyer entitled Medication Safety. Linden describes this as "one more way Wellington offers protection against accidents to the people we insure."

Linden points out that seniors are particularly vulnerable to the side effects of medication.

While people over the age of 65 constitute about 10 per cent of the Canadian population, they consume 40 per cent of all prescribed medication and a high proportion of over-the-counter drugs.

This month, Wellington Insurance is sponsoring a special broadcast of Canadian Consumer - The Radio Edition with information provided by the Canada Safety Council on medication safety, the theme of National Senior Safety Week, November 12-18.

The Canada Safety Council emphasizes the importance of checking with your doctor or pharmacist to determine whether medication should be taken on an empty stomach or with food and what foods or other medication

should be avoided during treatment. The broadcast also stresses the importance of determining if medication affects alertness or co-ordination and recommends storing medicine in

a cool, dry place to guard against deterioration.

More information on medication safety is available from Wellington Insurance brokers.

Children most susceptible to HPV virus

—Studies prove that warts are one of the most common skin ailments particularly amongst children due to the fact that their immune systems are not fully matured thus facilitating the penetration of the HPV wart virus. One recent estimate cited that up to one quarter of all new dermatology clinic patients seek treatment for warts, despite the fact that many people don't even bother seeing a doctor about them.

We now know that warts are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) and even though warts are subject to all sorts of superstitions, we know that the poor toad, that harmless little amphibian is not the culprit. It is true though, that warts are contagious and usually occur at a site where the skin has been scratched or cut, such as fingers, palm of the hand and sole of the feet. We also know that the HPV virus breeds well in damp areas such as dirt and sand, in which children like to play, hence another reason they're so susceptible to this virus.

Contact with common warts does not necessarily mean that you will develop them nor do they pose a health problem because frequently a person's immune system is strong enough to defeat this slow-acting virus. However, warts are unsightly and can interfere with one's everyday activity particularly in the case of the plantar wart found on the palm of the hand or the sole of the feet which can be quite painful.

Getting rid of warts does not always mean a trip to the doctor. Long before the HPV was identified, "magical" treatments were used and were particularly effective with children, through the power of suggestion. One of most popular remedies was to rub

your wart with a copper penny and then bury it. The copper penny treatment is interesting because today, copper is thought to have an anti-viral effect. It was for this very reason that Cuplex, a new OTC medicine, incorporated copper acetate into its new Cuplex gel wart remover product.

OTC remedies first line of attack

Wart medicines that can be used at home work on the three most prevalent types: common, plantar, and mosaic (a closely packed group of small plant warts). The most effective usually contain solutions of salicylic and lactic acids, which slowly generate to remove the wart.

Treating warts with OTC remedies should be simple, but in the past they have posed problems, particularly for children, due to the high acid content found in "wart remover" products and the brush applicators which often cause the solution to run on to healthy skin and irritate unaffected areas, which is particularly harmful on children's delicate skin. Cuplex gel has been designed specifically for children and thus eliminates these common problems with a specially designed applicator tip which delivers a precise dose to the affected area; the thick gel won't spread out and irritate healthy tissue. It dries into a thin waterproof layer that does not need to be bandaged—ideal for use on children's warts. Cuplex gel also has a lower acid content than other OTC remedies; thus being less likely to irritate a child's sensitive skin.

These improved OTC remedies are easy and prevent time consuming trips to the doctor. In fact, they're so simple, you might even call them magic.

Warning: Cold temperatures take toll on feet

Though the temperatures on most winter days aren't severe, prolonged exposure to low temperatures and direct contact with extremely cold, damp surfaces can lead to frostbite—a more serious consequence of cold feet.

"Though people bundle up with heavy coats, gloves and scarves, they often forget that their feet need special attention," says Neil Naftolin, Podiatrist and member of Dr. Scholl's Foot Health Advisory Board. To keep feet warm and healthy this winter, Neil Naftolin recommends the following:

- When outdoors, be sure to keep feet warm, dry and moving. Frostbite is the actual freezing of tissues due to excessive exposure to low temperatures. Be alert to numbness—the first sign of frostbite. Insulate feet against cold and dampness with wool or thermal insoles: Insoles will provide cushioning warmth to help keep feet comfortable. Always wear water-resistant boots with thick soles to keep feet well-protected. Two pairs of socks also helps keep feet warm. Finally, boots should be roomy enough so that they don't restrict blood circulation.

- If feet feel cold or numb after a trek outdoors, gently massage them to restore circulation. Soak feet in tepid—

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not hot—water, or expose them at room temperature until they're warm. Do not place feet on hot surfaces such as a heater or radiator; allow them to warm up naturally. If blisters, pain, or colour changes, seek medical attention immediately.

- When confined in boots, skin on the feet become dry and flaky due to the evaporation of moisture. Apply a foot and leg conditioning lotion daily to help skin retain moisture and protect feet from the drying effects of cold weather.

The next time the weatherman says temperatures will be heading to zero, be prepared from your head down to your toes: don't let winter put your feet at risk.

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