The top 10 misconceptions about medications

The use of medications has significantly evolved over the years and with more medications have come more misconceptions. As pharmacy students, we wanted to address what we believe to be the top ten misconceptions about medications.

10. I’m sick, I need an antibiotic.

You are feeling under the weather: you think you need antibiotics? No! Antibiotics are not always the best answer. Diseases, like the common cold, will often go away without the use of medications. Often, these diseases are caused by viruses. Antibiotics target bacteria so they don’t work against viruses. If your provider doesn’t think you need antibiotics, trust their judgement!
9. If it works for them, it’ll work for me.

It is easy to assume that because a medication may work for one person, that it will have a similar effect on someone else. This is often not the case. How medications affect individuals depend on many factors including weight, gender, race, current medical conditions, and other medications. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that a medication will have the same effect on two people. This is why it is important to never share prescription medications with other people.

8. I can stop taking my medications if I start feeling better.

Although it may be tempting to stop taking your antibiotics once your symptoms go away or to discontinue your antidepressants if you feel better, you should not stop taking prescription medications without approval from your healthcare provider. Abruptly discontinuing medications can have serious consequences. This is why it is important to always continue your medications unless your healthcare provider states otherwise.

7. Missed a dose? Just double the next one.

It may seem logical to make up a missed medication dose by taking double the next time. In many situations, doubling a dose can have serious adverse effects. For example, taking a double dose of an anti-seizure medication could result in severe dizziness, shakiness, and vomiting. For your safety, it is crucial to ask a healthcare provider what to do if you forget to take your medication.

6. Generics aren’t as good as brand medications.

People often think that since generic medications are cheaper than the brand formulation, the generic is not as effective. Although generic and brand medications may have some differences in their inactive ingredients, their active ingredients are always the same. Generic manufacturers must also prove that their version will have the same effect as the brand medication at the same dose. Generics are effective!
5. I need to take supplements.

Although it may seem like a good idea to add dietary supplements to your daily routine, supplementation is usually unnecessary. If you are diagnosed with a nutrient deficiency, you should speak with your healthcare provider to see if supplements are necessary. For most individuals, a well-balanced diet will provide all vitamins/minerals needed!

4. If it’s natural, it must be safe.

It seems logical to assume that because something is made in your body or comes directly from Nature it is safer to take than other medications. However, natural products do not have to go through a process as rigorous as that of synthetic medications and do not need to be pure. Therefore, it is uncertain if a natural product will have the desired effect or what side effects may result from taking it. So, make sure you talk with your pharmacist to see if a product you are interested in is safe and right for you.

3. If the pharmacy sells it, it’s safe to take.

Your local pharmacy is stocked with products that can be very useful, but that does not mean they are always safe to take. Before taking any over the counter medications, you should talk with the pharmacist to see what’s best for you. You should also be cautious when considering taking multiple medications because medications can have detrimental interactions. Always speak to a pharmacist first!

2. The doctor knows everything.

Healthcare providers go through extensive education and training in order to be able to provide the best care possible, but this does not mean they know everything. If you seek medical help, it is important to be as clear and detailed as possible. This includes your symptoms, medical conditions, current medications, etc. If you don’t do this, the provider may not be able to accurately determine which medication may be best for you, if needed. Healthcare providers are knowledgeable, but at the end of the day no one knows your body better than you!
1. There’s a pill for that.

Just because there is a medication on the market that can be used for a certain disease, it doesn’t mean it’s the most effective way to treat that condition. In many cases, making lifestyle changes can be just as effective, and in some cases more effective than taking a pill. A healthy lifestyle also plays a crucial role in the prevention of numerous diseases. Even though taking a pill is much easier, adopting a healthy lifestyle is more beneficial in the long run!

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We are PharmD students at the University of Kentucky College of pharmacy. We are writing this blog as a part of our public engagement class. #UKCOPPublicEngagement

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