



**Central
New York
Poison
Center**

1-800-222-1222

Poison Prevention

Newsletter

March 2003

 SUNY Upstate Medical University
University Hospital • 750 East Adams Street • Syracuse, NY 13210

OTC - Over the Counter Medications

Medication still tops the list of potential poisons for unintentional exposures. Over the counter drugs are used to treat headaches, heartburn, coughs and colds, and other routine health problems. Sometimes the food you eat or the beverages you drink, other medications, or tobacco can interact with medications.

Just the facts

Americans buy about 5 billion over-the-counter drugs each year

According to the Consumer Healthcare Products Association more than 600 OTC drugs contain ingredients and doses that 20 years ago were only available by prescription.

OTC drugs are safe but not risk-free. Any medicine that is strong enough to help you can also hurt you

Most people don't read the label

Be a **SMART** consumer, talk to your pharmacist or healthcare provider about OTC drugs.

Continued on page 3

Herbal Medicines

How safe are Herbal Medications?

By Lee W. Livermore, CNYPC Health Educator

All Natural!
Clinically Proven!
New Drug-Free!
Smart Herbal Supplement!

We all have heard about the fantastic claims that herbal medicines can offer, but can we trust them?

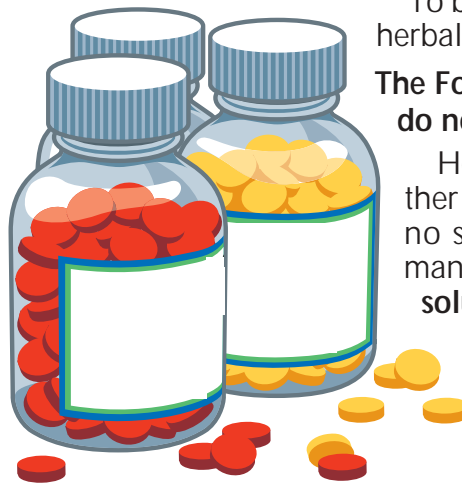
Most of want to lose weight, increase our stamina, or have sharper mental focus and we want the products we use to be safe and natural. Americans are turning to herbal remedies to deliver with a belief that using these supplements will ensure good health.

If you are taking St. John's Wort for depression, Echinacea to ward off colds, or appetite suppressants to lose weight, you may be putting yourself at risk for poisoning. Herbals can cause adverse effects like stomach problems, allergic reactions, and problems with blood clotting. Additionally, harmful interactions between herbals and prescription drugs can occur.

To be safe consider the facts when taking herbal medicines.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) do not regulate herbal remedies

Herbal remedies are not classified as either food or drugs. Therefore, there are no safety guidelines or standards that manufacturers have to meet. There is **absolutely no guarantee** that the pills you buy in your local health food store or pharmacy are safe or even contain what they say they do. Claims of



Continued on page 4



**Central
New York
Poison
Center**

1-800-222-1222

Poison emergency?
Poison information?
Call Us!
Visit us on the web:
www.cnypoison.org

Second-Hand Smoke is a Poison Too!

There has been a lot of media attention about second-hand smoke and the health problem that are related to it. Consider the facts that have been published recently:

- About one-third of the world's adults, over one thousand million people, smoke cigarettes.
- For every eight smokers killed by active smoking, passive smoking kills one non-smoker.
- Cigarette smoking among adults has declined. However, smoking amongst teenagers has increased. 3,000 additional children in the U.S. start smoking each day.
- Second-hand smoke is carcinogenic to adults and children.
- Because the bodily tissues and organs of children are still developing, second-hand smoke has a much greater detrimental effect on them than on adults, resulting in reduced growth and development.
- Children exposed to secondhand smoke are twice as likely to develop asthma and other health problems
- A poison can simply be *anything that causes harm to a person or an animal*. Help to make difference in someone's life today by preventing exposure to secondhand smoke.

Become an outreach educator for the CNY Poison Center

The CNY Poison Center offers a Train-the-Trainer Program for teaching Poison Prevention. If you can answer yes to any of the questions below then this is a program for you.

Are you:

- An educator?
- A program coordinator?
- Nurse?
- Day Care provider?
- 4-H or scout leader?
- Parent?
- Interested in the health and prevention education?

Do you:

- Already teach poison prevention in the classroom or to your clients?
- Get asked to do health fairs and are looking to add a new program and materials?
- Enjoy giving back to the community?

Here are the benefits for you and others:

Gain powerful insights in learning:

- To identify common potential poisons
- To understand the prevention and treatment for poison exposures
- Methods to poison proof the home and work environment
- The mission and purpose of the staff and services of the Central New York Poison Control Center

A POISON CAN BE...

- **any substance** that will cause harm to a person or an animal.
- **something that can cause** sickness and even death.
- found in **any form**: solid, liquid, sprays, and even gases.
- **found anywhere** in your home, school, or office.
- **hard to distinguish** from a food product or candy.
- **quick** to make you sick **or** it can cause a problem over time.
- **dangerous** and hurt your body even if you don't **feel** sick.

VISIT US ON THE WEB

WWW.CNYPPOISON.ORG

You can now visit us on the web. The Central New York Poison Center's web site is a wealth of information. Get the facts on poison tips, education, and more.

We offer educational opportunities with Train-the-trainer programs designed for teachers, healthcare professionals and childcare providers. You can download our ABC's of teaching poison prevention and begin today!

All of our educational materials are in a (pdf) format for easy downloading and reproducing. You can catch up on back issues of our newsletter "Poison Prevention" too!

While you are there take our site survey and let us know how you liked the site. We are always looking for valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement.

OOPS! I should have read the label!

Most poisonings are accidents. Taking simple precautions may prevent them.

- Take the time to read labels on all products before use. Labels provide essential information about the safest use of a product.
- Don't assume that similar kinds of products have the same dosage, directions or safety information. Read the label on each new product you use.
- Check to make sure you are selecting the product you intend to use. Many product packages look alike, especially products that come in tubes or bottles.
- It is important to brush your teeth, gargle with mouthwash and take medication in adequate lighting. Using products in tubes or taking medications in the dark often leads to mix-ups.

Looking for a Speaker?

The CNYPC health educator is available for speaking engagements and health fairs. If you have staff and clients that could benefit from a workshop or presentation on Poison Prevention, Treating Yourself With Care for seniors, Inhalation Abuse Awareness for Parents. Then call the Health Educator at 315-464-5375 today!

You can make a difference!

It has been said that the best form of marketing is word of mouth. I agree and I hope you do too! In the movie *Pay it Forward* there was a young boy given a social project to do something that would have an impact on the community in a positive way. So he came up with the idea of doing a favor for someone, without being asked. Instead of having the favor being paid back to him, he asked that it be paid forward three times to other people.

I am asking you to pay it forward today and everyday. Please tell someone about the poison center, share the message about the new national number 1-800-222-1222. Think of the impact that it could have in your community. You could be saving someone's life.

Over the Counter Medications

Continued from page 1

- S** Side effects. Some OTC can cause drowsiness in adults and excitability in children.
- M** Medications. What other medications are you currently taking including vitamins, and dietary supplements?
- A** Active ingredients are the specific chemicals ingredients that make a drug work. Be aware of the active ingredients, you might already be taking medications that contain the same ingredients. This could lead to an overdose.
- R** Read the label. For warnings and directions.
- T** Take only the recommended dosage. If one works two is better, not true.

- If you wear glasses or corrective lenses, make sure you are wearing them when using medications or household cleaners.
- Never exceed the recommended dosage (for your age or weight) on over-the-counter medications. In excess, many of these products can be very dangerous.
- If taking more than one medication, make sure they are safe to take together.
- Do not take two medications at the same time that contain the same active ingredient(s).
- Check expiration dates on medications and flush any expired products down the toilet.
- Keep products in their original containers. Never store chemicals in empty food containers.
- Never mix chemicals, especially cleaning products. The combination of products can be toxic!

If you do find yourself in a situation where you "should have read the label first", call the CNY Poison Center immediately at **1-800-222-1222**. We are available 24 hour a day to answer your poisoning questions or to respond to your poison emergency.

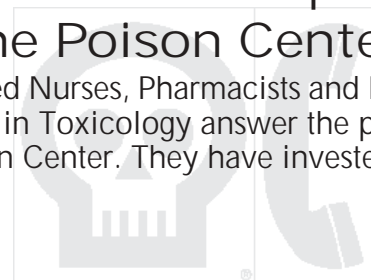
Iron Supplements

Iron poisoning is a leading cause of death in children due to poisoning. The most common sources are found in any kind of vitamins with iron (for children or adults), including prenatal vitamins. Many kinds of iron supplements and vitamins resemble candy, and even a few pills taken accidentally could be fatal to a small child. Always keep these products well out of reach of children. Be aware that if you buy vitamins you should buy the kind that does not contain iron unless specifically directed to do so by your doctor.

Adults can also take too much iron. Always consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking iron supplements. Ferrous Sulfate is a common iron supplement. If you are currently taking ferrous sulfate, make sure you read the label for any update information. If you have any questions whether it is safe, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Who answers the phone at the Poison Center?

Registered Nurses, Pharmacists and Doctors who are trained in Toxicology answer the phones at the CNY Poison Center. They have invested thousands of hours in



good health or well being listed on a package may not be substantiated.

Proving the claims of Quality and Quantity

As Herbal remedies are not regulated, it is difficult to confirm or disprove the purity or concentration of the actual plant listed in the ingredients. Consumers should be aware that the quality of an herbal product could be affected by many factors including the use of the actual plant and part of the plant. In addition, the concentration of active ingredients may vary from plant to plant due to different growing conditions.

Not all of the ingredients are listed on the label

Herbal remedies can even contain ingredients not listed on the label. There is no way to be sure that a plant's active ingredients are actually in the herbal pills you buy, since manufacturers are not required to test or implement the same quality control measures that are routine for regulated drugs. There is no guarantee that one bottle of an herbal remedy will have the same ingredients as another bottle of the same product.

Common misconceptions people have about herbal remedies

The product is "natural" so it must be safe. This is not necessarily true. Many "natural" products can

poison you even if you follow the label directions. Be aware "natural" products can interact with both over the counter and prescription medication.

Disclaimers protect the manufacturer.

This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. This statement is worded to protect the manufacture and shift the responsibility on to the consumer. Know the risks, and become wise consumers.

Despite all the challenges, herbal medicines show great promise and should not be neglected.

A number of studies have shown that certain herbs may help people with conditions ranging from headaches to high cholesterol. It's a well-known fact herbs and plants have been widely used throughout history, and many of the more common medications used today have their origin in an herb. Some present day supplements may have the potential to become the next "miracle drug", like aspirin or digitalis.

Before taking any Herbal Remedies consult your physician.

If you have questions or concerns about herbal products, consult your physician or pharmacist. For more information contact the Poison Center. We're here 24 hours a day; seven days a week - call us!