HUMAN MEDICINES

IRISH MEDICINES BOARD

our advice on

medicines and side effects

medicines and side effects

Medicines can help people live longer and healthier lives. They can help cure or treat an illness or disease and can also prevent some conditions from developing in the first place.

During the course of our lives, it is likely that we will all need to take medicines. These might include vaccines to prevent illness or prescription medicines such as antibiotics to treat serious infections. Over-the-counter medicines are also available and include products to treat minor symptoms like headaches as well as dietary supplements.

Most of us will not experience any problems when using medicines. However, all medicines have some risks associated with their use and so a small number of people may develop side effects (also known as adverse reactions).

This leaflet provides useful information about what you should do if you believe that you have had a side effect to a medicine.

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What is a side effect?

A side effect or adverse reaction is an unwanted or unintentional reaction that a person may experience after taking a medicine. In many cases, side effects to medicines are mild and do not mean that you have to stop taking the medicine. However, for some people, the side effects can sometimes be more serious and may require a change in treatment or, in rare cases, some additional medical treatment.

While many people take medicines without any problems, all medicines carry some risks. These risks should be looked at in the context of the overall benefit of a medicine to a person's health and the condition being treated. Even where a reaction to a particular medicine is severe, it may still be beneficial to prevent the complications of the underlying illness by continuing the treatment and managing the unwanted effects at the same time.

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Where can I get information on side effects?

The package leaflet that accompanies a medicine is intended to provide people with information about that medicine. A very important part of this leaflet is the section dealing with potential side effects. Some of this information may also be printed on the product packaging.

It is really important that you take the time to read this information. In addition, when your doctor prescribes a medicine for you, take time to talk about the possible side effects of the medicine they are recommending for you.

What are the chances of having a side effect?

The package leaflet provides information about the potential side effects of a medicine and the chances of developing those side effects. For example, a very rare side effect affects fewer than 1 in 10,000 people. A very common side effect is one that affects more than 1 in 10 people taking the medicine.

When your doctor prescribes a medicine, take time to talk with him or her about the possible side effects of the medicine they are recommending

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How do I know if I have had a side effect to a medicine?

Side effects vary and depend on the medicine and the person. Examples of common side effects include headaches, fever, dizziness, skin rashes, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and drowsiness. Some side effects may happen immediately while others may develop over a period of time. However, many side effects to medicines are mild and will go away within a few days as your body adjusts to the medicine.

What should I do if I think I have had a side effect?

If you are concerned that you have had a side effect to a medicine, contact your doctor or pharmacist who will advise on any treatment you may need. They may also report the suspected side effect to the Irish Medicines Board (IMB). Should you wish, you can also report side effects directly to the IMB. While a report of a side effect does not necessarily mean that it is has been caused by the medicine you took, the IMB encourages people to report all suspected side effects.

In many cases, side effects to medicines are mild and will go away within a few days as your body adjusts to the medicine

If you have any concerns about a potential side effect that you may have experienced after taking a medicine, contact your doctor or pharmacist

Why do I need to report a side effect?

It is very important that suspected side effects from the use of a medicine are reported as these reports allow the IMB to monitor the safety of each product as it is used. It is also an important way of identifying any new potential safety issues with medicines. When the IMB receives a report of a suspected side effect, it evaluates the case and considers whether this may be a new safety concern or whether similar cases have been previously reported. The IMB also has access to global safety information which helps in identifying emerging safety issues.

When new safety issues are identified, the IMB may, if appropriate, instruct the company concerned to include this new information on the package leaflet. It may also inform healthcare professionals of the new information. Where a serious safety issue emerges with a medicine, the IMB has the power to vary the way that product is used or to suspend the sale of the product if it poses a risk to public health.

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What can I do to minimise the risk of side effects?

Always follow the advice of your doctor and pharmacist on the recommended storage, dose and length of time you should take a medicine. Make sure you tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other medicines you are taking. Some medicines can react with each other and this could pose a health risk.

How can I report a side effect?

You can report a suspected side effect or adverse reaction in a number of ways:

1. To your doctor, pharmacist, dentist or nurse who can then notify the IMB. They will also consider if you need to adjust your treatment or if you will need an alternative treatment.
2. On the IMB website **www.imb.ie**
3. By calling the IMB on (01) 676 4971

The Irish Medicines Board

The Irish Medicines Board's role is to protect and enhance public and animal health through the regulation of medicines, medical devices and healthcare products.

What does the IMB do?

As the regulatory authority, the IMB monitors the safety of medicines available in Ireland. It aims to ensure that all medicines purchased here are safe, effective and of high quality. The IMB identifies and addresses safety issues so that medicines do not compromise the health of patients.

More Information

This is one in a series of information leaflets that are available from the IMB and from the IMB website, **www.imb.ie**.

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