

Preventing Medication Mix-Ups

Many drug names look alike or sound alike, even to physicians and pharmacists. Medication dispensing errors involving confused drug names occur about one percent of the time at retail pharmacies. This may seem like a small percentage; however, that one percent translates to approximately 30 million of the 3 billion prescriptions filled at U.S. pharmacies each year.

Pharmacy errors can lead to serious consequences if not caught. Patients may suffer adverse symptoms due to taking the wrong medications, and may even experience unsafe interactions with other drugs they're taking.

To help prevent potential errors, members should consider adopting the following practices when filling prescriptions at retail pharmacies:

- **Eyeball it:** Open the bottle at the pharmacy, show the contents to your pharmacist. Make sure the medication looks correct to both of you.
- **Take your time:** When filling a new prescription, allow the pharmacist to provide detailed dosage instructions and other information about the drug.
- **Practice teach-back:** Do you understand the medication dosage and instructions? Test yourself by explaining the information back to your pharmacist, or even demonstrating how you will follow the instructions.

With these techniques, you can help prevent medication errors that can cause health problems and lead to higher health care costs.

To view a list of commonly-confused medications, see the chart below. To access a more complete list, published by the Institute for Safe Medication Practices, go to the "How to Obtain Care" section of the Member area of the WPS Web site and click on "Confused Drug Name List," posted under "Pharmacy Information."

10 Commonly-Confused Prescription Drugs

Drug Name	Used to Treat	Confused With	Used to Treat
Amaryl	Diabetes	Reminyl	Alzheimer's
Aricept	Alzheimer's	Aciphex	Acid Reflux Disease
Avandia	Diabetes	Coumadin	Heart Disease
Celebrex	Pain	Celexa	Depression
Inderal	Blood Pressure	Adderal	Attention Disorders
Colochicine	Gout	Clonidine	Hypertension
Lamictal	Neurological Disorders	Lamisil	Fungal Infections
Paxil	Depression	Plavix	Heart Disease
Serezone	Depression	Seroquel	Neurological Disorders
Zyprexa	Neurological Disorders	Zyrtec	Allergies

Sources: Institute for Safe Medication Practices, National Patient Safety Foundation