

## Question #70416

Self- medication is very harmful and dangerous why?

### Answer:

Self-medication is the treatment of common health problems with medicines especially designed and labeled for use without medical supervision and approved as safe and effective for such use. Medicines for self-medication are often called 'nonprescription' or 'over the counter' (OTC) and are available without a doctor's prescription through pharmacies.

Self-medication is also linked to several risks for the self-medicated patient and, in some cases, for the community. Among the dangers of self-medication we may quote incorrect self-diagnosis; masking of an underlying severe health condition and consequent failure to seek medical advice promptly; rare but severe adverse effects; failure to recognize contraindications and potential drug-drug and drug-food interactions; failure to recognize that the same active substance is already being taken under a different name; incorrect route or manner of administration; inadequate dosage; risk of dependence or abuse; storage in incorrect conditions and; incorrect choice of therapy. At the community level, improper self-medication produces an increment in drug induced disease with the consequent increase in public health expenditure. The essential risks of self-medication are multiple drug use and the risk of drug interactions, self-medication and OTC medications abuse, misdiagnosis and incorrect choice of treatment.

**Multiple drug use and the risk of drug interactions.** A drug interaction is defined as the modification of the effect (therapeutic effect and/or toxicity) of a drug by concomitant or previous administration of another drug or food. The probability of prejudicial drug-drug interactions is expected to increase exponentially with the number of drugs taken simultaneously by a patient.

**Self-medication and OTC medications abuse.** Drug abuse has been defined as (persistent or sporadic) excessive drug use inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practice. The intentional use of excessive doses or the intentional use of therapeutic doses but for purposes other than the indication of the drug constitute drug abuse.

**Misdiagnosis and incorrect choice of treatment.** Many non-specific symptoms are common to wide array of health conditions. Treatment of minor, non-specific symptoms with OTC medications can mask a severe, underlying disease (especially when the treatment is taken for a longer period than recommended in the label or package insert) and delay an appointment with the physician. Misdiagnosis is also a very common and important issue in the case of infectious diseases, which can have different causes (bacteria, virus, fungus, parasites) each them requiring a specific treatment. Incorrect choice of treatment of an infectious disease can aggravate the health condition of the patient and help to spread resistant strains of bacteria (an important public health concern).

**Sources:**

1. [10.2174/157488610792245966](https://doi.org/10.2174/157488610792245966)
2. <http://www.wsmi.org/about-self-care-and-self-medication/what-is-self-medication/>
3. Solomon W, Abede GM. Practice of self-medication in Jimma Town. Ethiop J Health Dev. 2003;17:111–6.

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