

# Self-Medication with Over-The-Counter (OTC) Drugs

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## I. INTRODUCTION

People throughout the world suffer common health problems and their symptoms in roughly the same frequency. Surveys conducted in numerous countries indicate that 9 out of every 10 people suffer from at least one aspect of unwellness during the course of any 4-week period.

People generally respond in the same way to these problems, letting the condition run its course about half the time, turning to non-prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medications about a quarter of the time.

The phrase Over The Counter (OTC) drugs has no legal recognition in India. All the drugs not included in the list of “on prescription-only” drugs are considered to be non-prescription drugs (or OTC drugs). Prescription-only drugs are those medicines that are listed in schedules H and X of the Drug and Cosmetics Rules. Hence OTC drugs means legally allowed to be sold “Over The Counter” by pharmacists, i.e. without a prescription from a healthcare professional or Registered Medical Practitioner.

Trend of using OTC drugs/self-medication is high in India. India currently ranks 11th in the global OTC market size. It is estimated that it will reach 9<sup>th</sup> position within five years.

Self medication increases the chances of illicit use of drug and drug dependency. Due to uncontrolled use of OTC drugs, signs and symptoms of underlying diseases are suppressed hence incidence of delayed diagnosis, complications, treatment failure and drug resistance are increasing.

### SELF CARE AND SELF-MEDICATION:

Self-care may be defined as the care taken by individuals towards their own health and well being, including the care extended to their family members and others.

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 ‘non-prescription’ or ‘over the counter’ (OTC) and are available without a doctor’s prescription through pharmacies. In some countries OTC products are also available in supermarkets and other outlets.

### REASONS FOR PRACTICING SELF-MEDICATION:

- Lack of time or avoid waiting longtime to visit the physician
- Minor illness / Disease is not serious
- Cheap & Economical
- Quick Relief/ Emergency use
- Prior experience about drug

### DRUGS COMMONLY USED AS SELF-MEDICATION:

- Analgesics and NSAIDs
- Antipyretics
- Cold/Cough preparations
- Antacids, Acid blockers
- Vitamins
- Antibiotics
- Antihistamines
- Antiemetic
- Ophthalmic preparations
- Antidiarrhoeal
- Local application drugs

### FACTORS INFLUENCING SELF-MEDICATION:

Self-medication is influenced by many factors such as education, family, society, law, availability of drugs and exposure to advertisements.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

#### Individual level

- An active role in his or her own health care
- Self-reliance in preventing or relieving minor symptoms or conditions
- Education opportunities on specific health issues
- Convenience

- Economy, particularly since medical consultations will be reduced or avoided.

#### At community level

- Saving scarce medical resources from being wasted on minor conditions
- Lowering the costs of community funded health care programs
- Reducing absenteeism from work due to minor symptoms
- Reduce the pressure on medical services where health care personnel are insufficient
- Increase the availability of health care to populations living in rural or remote areas.

#### POTENTIAL RISK:

##### Individual level

- Incorrect self-diagnosis
- Failure to seek appropriate medical advice promptly
- Incorrect choice of therapy
- Failure to recognize special pharmacological risks
- Rare but severe adverse effects
- Failure to recognize or self-diagnosis contraindications, interactions, warnings and precautions
- Failure to recognize that the same active substance is already being taken under a different name
- Failure to report current self-medication to the prescribing physician (double medication/harmful interaction)
- Failure to recognize or report adverse drug reactions
- Incorrect route of administration
- Inadequate or excessive dosage
- Excessively prolonged use
- Risk of dependence and abuse
- Food and drug interaction
- Storage in incorrect conditions or beyond the recommended shelf life.

##### Community level

Improper self-medication could result in an increase in drug induced disease and in wasteful public expenditure.

#### DRUG FACTS LABEL:

Over the counter drugs have a drugs facts label. The label must describe the uses of the medicine along with the

conditions under which the medicine should not be used. The consumer must be given directions for the contraindications.

Drug facts label consist of:

- Product name (Brand name/ Trade name)
- Active ingredients: Therapeutic substances in medicine
- Purpose : Product category (such as antihistamine, antacid, or cough suppressant)
- Uses : Symptoms or diseases the product will treat or prevent
- Warnings: When not to use the product, when to stop taking it, when to see a doctor, and possible side effects.
- Directions : How much to take, how to take it, and how long to take it

Other facts to be observed are,

- Storage information
- Manufacturing date and expiry date of OTC drugs.
- OTC drugs must be consumed according to recommended dosage and duration.

#### PREVENTION OF POTENTIAL RISKS WITH SELF-MEDICATION:

##### Role of Nurse

Nurses are one who has potential role in preventing risks of self-medication. Because nurses is the one who work on three main therapeutic aspects of professionalism in his daily practice: **Information, therapeutic advice and education.**

##### Information

Whenever health professionals are prescribing drugs, he should give proper instructions and explain for what it is prescribed so that it will be helpful for the patient to understand and making his own decisions.

Given information should be at patient's comprehension level so that it will be helpful for them to understand its management.

##### Therapeutic advice

Lack of therapeutic compliance is a serious problem in both acute and chronic treatments and reflects a poorly-understood or incomplete description of the treatment aims. If patients are not well-informed they are unlikely to use

medication correctly. However, if the directions for use and the limitations of a given drug are explained-for example, dose, frequency of dose, treatment course, how to take it, etc., then patients have a set of guidelines which will help them to use the drug correctly, both now and in the future.

Inappropriate and erratic self-medication, along with lack of compliance, will only be reduced if patients are informed and understand clearly why certain advice has been given.

### Education

Inappropriate self-medication is the result of the medical model from which people have learnt. Proper health education should be given to the patients. By regularly adopting an educational attitude we can have an effect on large sectors of the population, on people who, in turn, may directly influence their friends and family. This aspect is of particular importance with respect to the self-medication of children by their parents or takes cares.

## II. CONCLUSION

Self-medication is an alarming concept. This is focused on the self-medication of allopathic drugs, their use, its safety and reason for using it. It would be safe, if the people who are using it, have sufficient knowledge about its dose, time of intake, side-effect on over dose, but due to lack of information it can cause serious effects such as antibiotic resistance, skin problem, hypersensitivity and allergy. Hence, developing country like India where we have poor economic status, education status as well as poor health care facilities. People have less knowledge regarding risks associated with their self-medication. We are on the edge of sword whether to promote self-medication or not. Hence it is recommended that holistic approach should be taken to prevent this problem, which includes proper awareness and education regarding the self-medication and strictness regarding pharmaceutical advertising.

A nurse has to spend some extra time in educating patients regarding the same. Improved knowledge and understanding about self-medication may result in rationale use and thus limit emerging microbial resistance issues.

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