



# Self-Medication: a Major Problem Worldwide that Could be Prevented



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## Introduction

The use of medications without medical consultation is referred as self-medication. These medications are often called 'nonprescription' or 'over the counter' (OTC) and are available without a doctor's prescription through pharmacies or are also available in supermarkets and other outlets. So, self-medication is an increasingly frequent phenomenon worldwide that is considered a public health problem [1]. The indiscriminate consumption of drugs entails disadvantages including decreasing clinical efficacy, an increase in treatment durations and prolongation of recovery. The patient self-medicates not only with OTC medications but also with those medications sold under prescription. This behavior induces the irrational use of medications. In the case of drugs that require a prescription, it is very common for self-medication to be reused after a previous prescription or purchased directly from a pharmacy [2]. This reality is far from being a completely safe practice, because self-medication can produce a series of health risks that in many cases are unknown by population: toxicity (side effects, adverse reactions and in some cases intoxication), lack of effectiveness because they are used in situations where they are not indicated, dependency or addiction, masking of serious clinical processes, delay in diagnosis and interactions with other medications or foods [3].

The drugs more used in self-medication are:

### Painkillers

Relieve or reduce the pain of different etiologies. There are several major types of painkillers, some of which can be obtained without a medical prescription. Self-medication with painkillers can mask a basic disease that requires treatment.

### Antibiotics

They are essential therapeutic tools for the treatment of infectious diseases. However, a high proportion of antibiotics is prescribed, dispensed and consumed inadequately, which represents the main cause of bacterial resistance, a phenomenon classified by the World Health Organization as a global public health problem [4].

### Anti-anxiety-medications

These medications reduce the feeling of anxiety or anguish and are sometimes used as relaxants or drugs against insomnia. Its effects can create habit, so they should not be taken for a long time and much less without medical prescription.

### Anti-flu medicines

They are used to reduce the symptoms associated with the common cold, these types of medications are not recommended for all patients due to their possible interactions with any other medication, and they have side effects alone such as gastrointestinal discomfort, drowsiness, dry mouth and constipation.

### Antidiarrheal medications

They are used to eliminate or relieve diarrhea, characterized by the frequent elimination of watery or soft stools. It is a common medicine in the home medicine cabinet; and although it generates an improvement in the symptoms, the causative agent of diarrhea may persist in the organism.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the problem of self-medication is posed because it implies a certain degree of clinical lack of control, due to the fact that frequently the patient does not identify certain commonly used drugs (analgesics, antipyretics, local anesthetics, etc.) as medicines, and usually stops take certain precautionary measures, such as informing your doctor or pharmacist of such use. This behavior induces the irrational use of medications and the problems derived from it that doctors must face every day [5]. These risks could be avoided by following some basic tips on self-medication:

- a) Not taking any medication that has to be prescribed by a doctor.
- b) Asking for the pharmacist or doctor advice In the case of medications that do not require a prescription.

- c) Self-medication must have a reasonable duration. If symptoms continue or the medical condition a doctor must be consulted.
- d) Informing the doctors of all the medicines have been taken (also medicinal herbs, vitamins, dietary supplements, homeopathy, etc).
- e) Read and keep the package leaflet for all medications. It is important to know what is taken, why it is taken and how and when it should be taken. Keep medications in their original packaging. This contains important information such as expiration, the batch, if it has to be kept in a refrigerator, etc. In addition, the packaging protects the medicine and guarantees its proper preservation [6].
- f) Avoid drinking alcohol when patients are taking medication because it can affect the ability to react, for example when driving vehicles or performing other dangerous activities.

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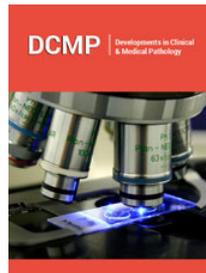
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