

Buying Medicines and Medical Products Online

Tips and Warnings for Consumers

With hundreds of drug-dispensing Websites in business, how can consumers tell which sites are legitimate ones, especially when it is very easy to set up a site that is very professional looking and promises deep discounts or a minimum of hassles?

If you buy medical products online, be aware of the following dangers:

- Purchasing a medication from an illegal Website puts you at risk. You may receive a contaminated or counterfeit product, the wrong product, an incorrect dose, or no product at all.
- Taking an unsafe or inappropriate medication puts you at risk for dangerous drug interactions and other serious health consequences.
- Getting a prescription drug by filling out a questionnaire without seeing a doctor poses serious health risks. A questionnaire does not provide sufficient information for a healthcare professional to determine if that drug is for you or safe to use, if another treatment is more appropriate, or if you have an underlying medical condition where using that drug may be harmful. The American Medical Association has determined that this practice is generally substandard medical care. FDA agrees.

FDA offers these tips to consumers who buy health products online:

- Check with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (www.nabp.net, (847) 698-6227) to determine whether a Website is a licensed pharmacy in good standing.
- Don't buy from sites that offer to prescribe a prescription drug for the first time without a physical exam, sell a prescription drug without a prescription, or sell drugs not approved by FDA.
- Don't do business with sites that have no access to a registered pharmacist to answer questions.
- Avoid sites that do not identify with whom you are dealing and do not provide a U.S. address and phone number to contact if there's a problem.
- Don't purchase from foreign Websites at this time because generally it will be illegal to import the drugs bought from these sites, the risks are greater, and there is very little the U.S. government can do if you get ripped off.
- Beware of sites that advertise a "new cure" for a serious disorder or a quick cure-all for a wide range of ailments.
- Be careful of sites that use impressive-sounding terminology to disguise a lack of good science or those that claim the government, the medical profession, or research scientists have conspired to suppress a product.
- Steer clear of sites that include undocumented case histories claiming "amazing" results.
- Talk to your healthcare professional before using any medications for the first time.

Consumers can report suspected illegal sites to the FDA at www.fda.gov/oc/buyonline/buyonlineform.htm.
The above excerpts are reprinted from the FDA. More consumer information about buying medicines and medical products online is available at www.fda.gov/oc/buyonline/default.htm.

For additional information on this and other health issues, visit: MedlinePlus.gov