Modern medicines are safe and effective if they are used properly. To help you and your family get the best from your medicines, it is important that you follow your pharmacist’s or doctor’s instructions about:

- how to use medicines (swallow, inhale, rub in)
- when to take the medicine (before meals, after meals, before bedtime)
- how much to take (two tablets once a day, or one tablet twice a day?) and
- any special instructions you need to follow.

If you have any questions about your own or your family’s medicine you can ask your pharmacist. Part of the pharmacist’s job is to help you understand how to choose (where appropriate), use and store medicines properly and safely.

When you go to the pharmacy for a non-prescription medicine for a child, you may be asked questions about the child’s symptoms or health. This is to make sure that you get the medicine that best meets the child’s needs. Sometimes, the pharmacist may advise a visit to the doctor’s.

Over half the cases of poisoning in children are caused by them swallowing medicines.

Young children are naturally curious and do not understand danger. You can’t expect children to understand the difference between a brightly-coloured pill and a sweet. Pills can often look like sweets because:

- there are only a few shapes that can be easily swallowed and
- bright colours help people who take several medicines tell one type from another.

Teach children that medicines are not child’s play! It can be difficult to persuade children to take their medicine but never pretend that medicines are sweets in order to persuade children to take them. This could confuse children about the difference between medicines and sweets. Teach young children always to check with an adult before they swallow anything unfamiliar.

**DON’T SHARE MEDICINES**

Remember that one person’s medicine can be another person’s poison. The powerful ingredients in a medicine prescribed by the doctor or bought from the pharmacy to help you could harm someone else. So don’t share your medicines with other people, especially children.

Medicines come in many different forms. All of them can be dangerous to children. When the pharmacist puts your medicine — whether capsules, tablets or liquid — into a bottle, it will be supplied with a child-resistant cap. These caps make it harder for children to get at the medicine and some make a clicking noise to warn you that someone is trying to open the bottle. But they are not childproof and many children can open them. Even though these medicine bottles are safer, you should still lock them away, where children cannot reach them.

Some people, such as the elderly or the infirm, find child-resistant caps hard to open. If this is so, the pharmacist can fit an ordinary screw-top on the medicine bottle. But if there are children living in the home or visiting, extra care should be taken to lock these medicines away where children cannot see or reach them.

Many tablets — such as the contraceptive pill — come in blister packs. Each pill has to be popped out of its own bubble, so it takes quite a lot of time and effort to get to a large number of pills. Even so, some children will have a go — so keep blister packs out of sight and safely locked away.

Children may also be tempted by bottles and tubes of creams and ointments. Some of these can be harmful to young skin or dangerous if swallowed.

Whatever your medicine, the message is the same: lock medicines away where children cannot see or reach them.
WHERE DO YOU KEEP THE MEDICINES

Do you keep them
- on the mantelpiece
- in a handbag or briefcase
- on the bedside table
- on a kitchen shelf
- in a bathroom cabinet without a lock

Think again!

In April 1997 a survey showed that eight out of 10 adults who live with young children do not lock medicines away.

If children live in or visit your home, make sure you lock your medicines away.

Do not keep medicines in the fridge unless your doctor or pharmacist has told you to. If your medicine does need to be kept in the fridge and there are children around, fit a safety lock to the fridge door.

If you want more information about medicines and safety, ask your local pharmacist.

Keeping unused medicines is asking for trouble. Take them to your local community pharmacy where the pharmacist will dispose of them free of charge.

Don't throw old medicines in the dustbin. They can end up on rubbish tips where children might find them.

Don't flush medicines down the toilet — they can pollute the water supply.

Emergency action

If you think a child has swallowed a medicine or poison
- get the child to the accident and emergency department of the nearest hospital as soon as possible
- take the container of the medicine or poison (and any remaining contents) with you so the doctor knows what the child has taken
- do not try and make the child sick — this may make things worse
- if the child is unconscious, lay him or her on his or her side to make breathing easier and to prevent him or her inhaling vomit if he is sick

Safety checklist
- Lock all medicines safely away from children.
- Teach children not to play with medicines.
- Warn children not to swallow anything unfamiliar.
- Take old and unwanted medicines to the pharmacy to be disposed of.

Medicines are not child's play

SOME TIPS FROM YOUR PHARMACIST ON KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE