

# Guide to purchasing safe pharmaceuticals

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It is important for South African consumers to make sure that the pharmaceutical products they purchase are manufactured safely and comply with the necessary standards, as taking unsafe, illegal medicines can have dangerous consequences.



Despite the fact that South Africa was one of the first developing countries to agree to the PIC/S (Pharmaceutical Inspection Convention and Pharmaceutical Inspection Co-operation Scheme) membership status, there are still many products on retail shelves that do not comply with these regulations.

## Warning signs

One of the most important steps that consumers can carry out is to check that the packaging and marketing material of a pharmaceutical product carry a valid registration code. The quality, safety and effectiveness of all medicines and complimentary medicines in SA are required to be assessed and approved by the South African Medicines Control Council [MCC].

Once a formulation is deemed 100% safe, it is registered and given a unique number that is required to be shown on all relevant packaging and product materials. Consumers are able to check this code against the list of registered medicines to ensure that it is valid and the product is indeed effective and safe.

Always check the expiry date on the medication packaging, as expired medicines can be damaging. Checking expiry dates doesn't only apply when one is in the pharmacy, it's also important to check the dates on medicines that have been stored at home. Many people keep pharmaceuticals in their cabinets and drawers for extended periods of time and often don't think to check them before taking them again after a number of months or years have passed.



It is also important to check the packaging of pharmaceutical products in store. If there are any signs of bloating, dents and crumples or water damage, it is best to avoid that unit as it may have been contaminated somewhere along the chain of distribution. It is also important to check what the home storage instructions are and to make sure the product is kept correctly. Medicines are made of chemical combinations and the environment in which they are stored can affect the chemical make-up that could render it ineffective or unsafe.

It is not advisable to buy pharmaceuticals online, as the trend has produced a number of fraudulent and unsafe products. It is definitely risky to use medicines which have been bought over the internet. There are thousands of obscure products that have no forms of validation or registration available and are advertised online, and there seems to be a worryingly large market of people purchasing them. In these cases there is very little traceability and information on where the products originate from, so one would definitely advise against it.

## Use reputable pharmacies

Rather visit reputable pharmacies when purchasing medicines. If one is in the pharmacy and one is unsure about anything, ask the pharmacist who has the specialist knowledge to give recommendations.

South Africa's consumers have the right to be 100% aware of the safety of their products and, should there be a need to

investigate, they are able to trace the process of distribution and manufacturing standards - all the way from the shelf in-store to the original raw materials. There is no reason why they should accept sub-standard and unsafe medicines.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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