

OTC

Self-care and self-medication practices are essential components of any health care systems. The use of over-the-counter (OTC) medications is a part of the self-medication process. The popularity of OTC medication use among patients may increase the abuse potential of OTC medications. With pharmacists being as accessible as they are, they are often the first line of contact for patients, and have the opportunity to educate and counsel patients on appropriate OTC medication use. The presence of a pharmacist ensures safe and effective use of OTC medications. Pharmacists can liaise with other health care providers in the management of self-care practices by patients. However, a pharmacist has traditionally been underutilized in this role.

OTC medicines or nonprescription medicines are terms used interchangeably to refer to medicines that can be bought without a prescription.

Key Pharmacist Counseling Reminders to Patients Using OTC Products

- Counsel patients on the proper use of the selected product, including dosage, dosage intervals, route of administration, and recommended duration of therapy, as well as proper storage of products
- Remind patients not to exceed the recommended dose of the product
- Emphasize the importance of reading the labels on OTC items before taking any medication and discarding expired medications
- Recommend that patients consult a physician if symptoms do not improve or worsen
- Remind patients to use OTC medications that treat specific symptoms
- Advise patients to exercise caution when using multiple medications; if unsure, they should consult a health care professional
- Remind patients to always inform their primary health care provider of all medications they are currently taking
- Urge patients to consult a health care professional before using any OTC products, especially if they are currently taking any other medications or have a preexisting medical condition
- Remind parents or caregivers of pediatric patients to use calibrated measuring devices to administer medications, to always read the label of the medication prior to administering it, and to give only those products formulated for pediatric patients
- Stress the importance of seeking guidance from a health care professional whenever in doubt about using any OTC products

The Role of the Pharmacist

While more is being done to promote awareness regarding the importance of the safety and appropriate use of OTC drugs, pharmacists are still the patient's best resource in the proper selection of OTC products.

Moreover, while it is important for all patients to properly use OTC products, individuals of advanced age, individuals with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, the paediatric population, and those currently using prescription drugs should always consult a health care professional when considering the use of OTC drugs to avoid possible contraindications, drug-drug interactions, food-drug interactions, drug-alcohol interactions, and/or dosing errors.

In assisting patients in the selection of OTC products, pharmacists should assess the patient's symptoms/condition to determine if self-treatment is appropriate or if medical treatment is warranted, as well as evaluating for potential allergies. When patients are taking multiple OTC products, pharmacists should encourage patients to always check the active ingredients

of these products and ensure that a particular ingredient is not in another product they are **taking to avoid possible over-dosages, and to use only products that treat their specific symptoms and therefore avoid the unnecessary use of multiple products.** As the profession of pharmacy continues to progress, the role of the pharmacist will expand as well. In the midst of these advances, pharmacists will always be considered the drug experts and the fundamental source of drug information for all patients who use these products. While it is virtually impossible for pharmacists to counsel every patient who uses an OTC product, pharmacists should remain accessible to patients. When a patient does seek guidance with regard to these products, pharmacists also should seize the opportunity to educate the patient about the importance of using these products appropriately. By conducting a thorough evaluation of the patient's needs, pharmacists can assist patients in making informed decisions regarding OTC selections to optimize therapy and ensure the safe use of these products. When used correctly, OTC products are very effective in treating a variety of common ailments. Recommendations from pharmacists enable patients to make educated choices regarding the use of OTC products.