

## Child resistant does not mean childproof

FOX 9 news in Minneapolis recently reported a tragic story. A 15-month-old child died after drinking the contents of a bottle that contained her heart medicine, **flecainide** (**Tambocor**). Since birth, the child's parents had given her three doses each day to slow her racing heart. But in a matter of minutes, the child was able to open the prescription bottle and drink all the medicine. The overdose of what was once life-saving medicine killed her.

The parents had been visiting a friend. The medicine was in a diaper bag, which was sitting at the mother's feet. After feeding the child, the mother sat her on the floor. She went into the kitchen to get another milk bottle from the refrigerator and was back in no time. But it was long enough for her child to open the bottle of medicine and drink it. The child was rushed to the hospital, but she could not be saved.

The parents were shocked to see how easily the cap came off the medicine

bottle. It was supposed to be a child resistant cap! A recent FOX 9 investigation into child resistant caps showed that many pharmacies use different caps. When tested, children 3 to 8 years old could quickly open the child resistant caps from Target, Walgreens, and Rainbow pharmacies. Many were opened in just a few seconds.

None of the children could open the caps from Snyder's, Cub Foods, Fairview, or Clancy's pharmacies. And yet all the bottles and caps appeared to meet federal safety guidelines.

Some of the pharmacies whose bottles the children could open are now questioning the safety of their child resistant caps. They are actively searching for safer bottle and cap designs. But you can't rely solely on child resistant caps to protect your children. And it's just not possible to watch children or grandchildren every second. So read **Check it out!** to learn what you can do to best protect children from accidental poisonings with medicines.



### **Check it out!**

To protect children from accidental poisonings with medicines:

✓ **Buy safety packaging.** Buy medicines and vitamins with child resistant caps or packaging. Replace caps tightly after use. But remember, *child resistant* doesn't mean *childproof*. Given enough time, children may be able to open the container.

✓ **Keep medicines out of reach.** Young children investigate their world by putting most things in their mouths. So store medicines in their original containers in a locked closet, cabinet, or drawer (not in the bathroom), where children cannot see or reach them.

✓ **Don't forget vitamins.** Vitamins are medicines, too. In fact, vitamins with iron can be especially poisonous to children, so be sure to lock them up.

✓ **Secure purses.** Keep purses and diaper bags (which may contain medicines) out of reach of children. Be aware of medicines that visitors may bring into your home. Children are curious and may investigate visitors' purses and suitcases.

✓ **Avoid taking medicine in front of children.** Also, don't give a child medicine while another child is watching. Young children learn by imitating adults.

✓ **Never call medicine candy.** Medicines and candy can look alike

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### **60 second safety tip**

■ **Don't miss the point.** Liquid medicines given in amounts less than 1 milliliter (mL) can be confusing. If a decimal point is overlooked, it can result in a 10-fold overdose. In one case, a mother picked up a prescription for **Reglan** (**metoclopramide**) syrup for her baby. **Reglan** is a medicine for stomach acid reflux. The mother bought an oral syringe to give her baby the medicine. The correct dose was 0.7 mL every 6 to 8 hours. But the mother did not see the "0" and the decimal point, so she thought the dose was 7 mL. The mother gave her baby 10 times more medicine than needed. After several doses, the baby was hospitalized for 2 days but recovered. Carefully read all medicine labels, and double check the dose to be sure you don't miss a decimal point.

▶ Brand name medicines appear in **green**; generic medicines appear in **red**.

## EpiPen is not like other pens

Some people have life-threatening allergic reactions to bee stings, peanuts, shellfish, or other things. When this happens, they must get help quickly. A medicine called **epinephrine** slows down allergic reactions and can prevent a reaction from getting worse. **Epinephrine** comes in an auto-injector device, called an **EpiPen** and **EpiPen Jr.** (for young children who weigh less than 66 pounds). Doctors often prescribe **EpiPen** for people with serious allergies. They tell their patients to keep the auto-injector close by in case it's needed during an allergic reaction. But using it correctly might not be as easy as it seems.

The **EpiPen** automatically gives a person a shot of **epinephrine** in his or her thigh when used correctly. It's shaped like a large pen or magic marker, with a black tip and a gray end (see Photo 1 below). The trouble is figuring out which end should be placed against the thigh to give the injection.

The pen-like device doesn't really work like a ballpoint pen. A ballpoint pen opens after clicking a button located on the top of the pen. But there's no button to push down on the **EpiPen** in order to inject the medicine. There's a gray cap at one end that must be removed before use, and a black tip on

the other end that holds the needle. The needle only comes out once the black tip is pushed forcefully against a person's leg (see Photo 2). But people have a natural tendency to hold the **EpiPen** upside down, put their thumb over the black tip, and press down, as they would a ballpoint pen. So they may accidentally inject the medicine into their thumb, or spray it into the air! Doctors and nurses have made this mistake, too.



**Photo 2.** If necessary, you can inject the medicine through light clothing, but your thumb does not need to push on the clear end of the auto-injector.

If the doctor has prescribed **EpiPen** for you or a family member, take the time now to learn how to use it, before you need it in an emergency. Ask the doctor to give you a prescription for the **EpiPen** trainer, too, so you can practice. Teach all family members, babysitters, school staff, and other caregivers how to use the auto-injector. (The **EpiPen** website, [www.epipen.com](http://www.epipen.com), has printable information and a training video.) Remember, the **EpiPen** only works once. If you make a mistake, there is no second chance to get the medicine. One last point: Don't forget to send in the tear-off postcard that comes with the **EpiPen**, or sign up on the website for email alerts. This way, the company can contact you when the medicine is close to its expiration date and becoming less potent so you can replace it right away.



**Photo 1.** The auto-injector is shaped like a pen. The black end (left) holds the needle. The grey cap (right) must be removed before use.

► Brand name medicines appear in **green**; generic medicines appear in **red**.

### **Check it out!** continued

and children can't tell the difference. They may eat and drink anything no matter how bad it tastes.

✓ **Alert babysitters.** Many poisonings occur when the daily household routine has been disrupted. So alert your babysitter to this risk and what to do to prevent poisonings.

✓ **Take the medicine with you.** If you are in the process of taking or giving medicine, take it with you to answer the door or phone. Never leave the medicine on the counter.

✓ **Teach children.** Remind children to never take a medicine unless an adult gives it to them. Also teach them that poisons often look like food or drink. Thus, they should ask an adult before eating or drinking anything.

✓ **Safely dispose of medicines.** Regularly clean out your medicine cabinet. Discard old medicines in their original containers after placing them in a sturdy container, like a plain brown box. Make this container the last thing you put in the garbage can before pick-up.

✓ **Call the Poison Center right away.** Keep the phone number of the Poison Center on or near your telephones (**1-800-222-1222**). If you suspect or know your child has taken a medicine, call immediately. Do not give the child anything to eat or drink, or make the child vomit unless the Poison Center tells you to.

✓ **Watch for repeat poisonings.** Children who have already taken medicine on their own are more likely to try it again.

## Learn to read your **prescription**

In our January/February 2005 issue, we quoted a famous author, Mark Twain, who wrote in 1864 that doctors should “*discard abbreviations... to avoid the possibility of mistakes.*” We agree. A prescription

for medicine should not be a mystery to understand. Many times there are combinations of letters and strange words that may seem like a foreign language. Well, it is—most of the abbreviations and

words used to write prescriptions come from Latin. We’d like to help decode this mystery by explaining each part of a typical prescription and translating some of the Latin abbreviations into English words.

### anatomy of a prescription

**A Your doctor's information.** Most prescriptions will show your doctor's name, address, telephone number, and medical license number. This helps you and your pharmacist call if there are questions. It also helps the pharmacist list the correct doctor in the pharmacy computer system, especially since some doctors' signatures are hard to read.

**B Your information.** Your name should be clearly written on prescriptions. Be sure it is spelled correctly before you give it to your pharmacist. Also be sure your age (or your child's age) is on the prescription. Your doctor may not be required to include your birth date or address. Each state has its own laws. However, you should add this information

to the prescription before you give it to your pharmacist just in case someone has the same name or a similar name.

**C Date.** Your doctor is required to include the date on which the prescription was signed.

**D Rx.** This is the symbol used for “prescription.” It has many possible origins. It may stem from an

ancient symbol for the eye of the Egyptian god Horus, who was called the “father of pharmacy.” It could also stem from the Latin word *recipe* meaning “take thou.”

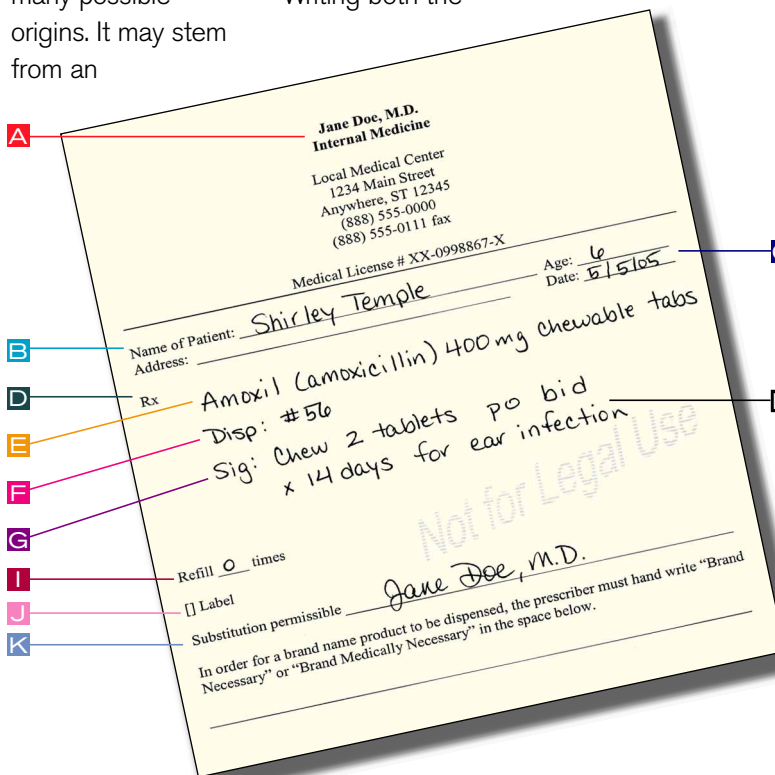
**E Medicine name and strength.** This is where your doctor writes the name of the medicine and the strength prescribed. Writing both the

brand and generic names is helpful to the pharmacist so that the medicine prescribed is less likely to be misread as another medicine with a similar name. Adding a zero before the decimal point for very small doses (0.25 mg, not .25 mg), and never adding a zero to whole number doses (1 not 1.0) also

helps make sure that no mistake happens because the decimal point is not seen.

**F Disp.** Your doctor will tell the pharmacist the total number of tablets or how much liquid medicine to give you.

**G Sig.** This is an abbreviation for the instructions on how to take or use your medicine. It stems from the Latin word *signa* (write) or *signetur* (let it be labeled). These are the directions the pharmacist will place on the label that goes on your medicine. Many times, additional abbreviations are used to describe when and how to take or use your medicine. You can use the table on the following page to help translate the more common abbreviations used. ▶



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**I Indication.** In this section, your doctor should list the reason you will be taking the medicine. Again, this information helps the pharmacist avoid misreading the prescribed medicine as a different medicine with a similar name. Medicines with similar names are rarely used to treat the same condition.

**I Refills.** In this section, your doctor will tell the pharmacist how many times the prescription can be refilled before you

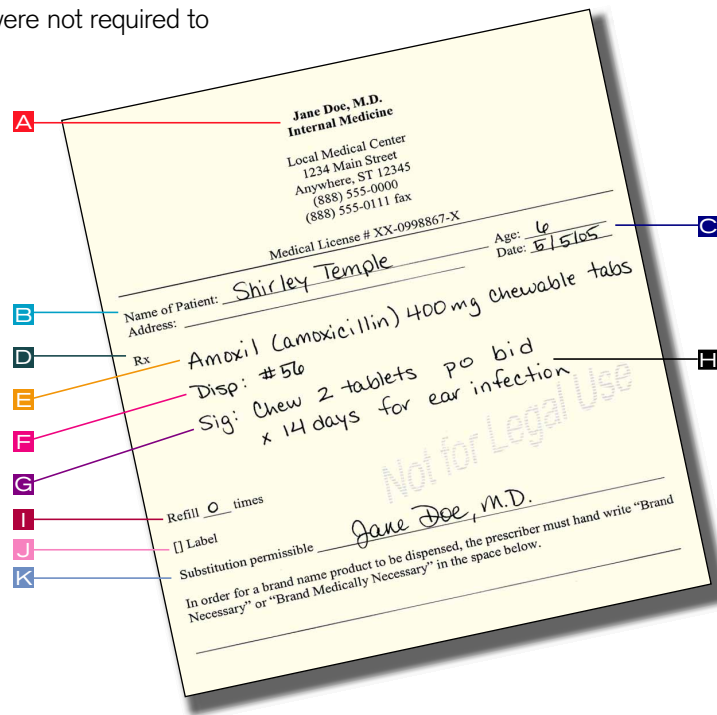
need a new prescription from your doctor.

**J Label.** In years past, pharmacists were not required to

print the name of the medicine on the label. The doctor would have to check this box to ask the pharmacist

to do this. Today, pharmacists always include the name of the medicine on the label for safety

reasons. But a checkbox for “Label” may still appear on your prescription, leftover from many years ago.



**K Substitution permissible.** If available, all prescriptions can be filled with a generic medicine (equal to the brand medicine prescribed) if your doctor signs the prescription on this line. If your doctor wants the pharmacist to give you a specific brand of medicine, he or she must specifically note this or sign in the space provided.

Common abbreviation	Latin words that make up the abbreviation	The meaning on your prescription
ac	ante cibum	before meals
bid	bis in die	twice a day
gtt	gutta	drop (as in 1 drop, 2 drops, and so on)
hs	hora somni	at bedtime
od*	oculus dexter	right eye
os	oculus sinister	left eye
po	per os	by mouth
pc	post cibum	after meals
prn	pro re nata	as needed
qd**	quaque die	every day, or daily
qid	quarter in die	4 times a day
tid	ter in die	3 times a day

\*Sometimes, od is used to mean “once daily.” The word “daily” should be used instead to prevent mistakes.

\*\*The abbreviation qd is considered dangerous. It should not be used because it has been mistaken as qid frequently. This mistake has led to serious harm, since people took once-a-day medicine four times each day.

### Contact Information

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