

All brand names are not the same medicine in different countries

An American man who took **Dilacor XR** (**diltiazem extended-release**) ran out of medicine while traveling to Serbia. A Serbian pharmacist refilled the prescription with a brand name medicine called **Dilacor**. But in Serbia, **Dilacor** is the brand name for **digoxin**, a totally different medicine than **diltiazem**.

Digoxin slows the heartbeat while **diltiazem** lowers blood pressure. The man did not notice the mistake and continued to take the medicine after returning home. He also took an extra tablet each day because he felt his blood pressure medicine was not working. By the third day, he began vomiting and developed headaches and chest pain, all signs of taking too much **digoxin**. He went to an emergency room where a doctor discovered the error. He was then admitted to the hospital and given a medicine called **Digibind** (**digoxin immune FAB**), which stops **digoxin** from working in the body.

If you travel outside of the United States (US), or buy medicines from another country, the brand name of your medicine may be used for a totally different medicine. The table below lists just a few examples of brand name medicines that have different ingredients in other countries. Some of these medicines are used to treat the same condition, but the doses are different because they contain different ingredients.

When you travel, always carry enough medicine for the entire trip plus a few days extra. Also take a list of your medicines that includes both generic and brand names (if you take a brand-name medicine). If you should unexpectedly need a refill while away, the generic name of the medicine will help the pharmacist dispense the correct product. As another safeguard, always tell the pharmacist the reason you are taking the medicine.

Brand name of the medicine	In the US: Generic name of the medicine Purpose of the medicine	In Europe: Generic name of the medicine Purpose of the medicine
FLOMAX	tamsulosin enlarged prostate	morniflumate (Italy) inflammation, pain, fever
NAQUA	trichlormethiazide remove excess water from body	furosemide (Portugal) remove excess water from body
NORPRAMIN	desipramine depression	omeprazole (Spain) stomach ulcer, heartburn
SOMINEX	diphenhydramine difficulty sleeping	promethazine (United Kingdom) difficulty sleeping
TREXAN	naltrexone drug (narcotic) addiction and dependence	methotrexate (Finland, Hungary) cancer, psoriasis (skin disorder), rheumatoid arthritis
VIVELLE	estradiol estrogen deficiency, menopause, osteoporosis (fragile bones)	ethinyl estradiol, norgestimate (Austria) acne, birth control

hazard alert

Recall Notice

On June 3, 2005, the maker of Children's **Tylenol** (**acetaminophen**) voluntarily withdrew these medicines from pharmacy shelves:

- Children's **Tylenol** Meltaways
- Children's **Tylenol** Soft Chews
- Jr. **Tylenol** Meltaways

The way these medicines were packaged and labeled could lead to mistakes. Some came in boxes that contained small packs of either one or two 80 mg tablets. But the front of the box said "medicine per dose 80 mg," and each pack stated "Children's **Tylenol** 80 mg." Even the two-tablet pack said "80 mg." This may have led one to believe that both tablets were needed for an 80 mg dose. The two tablets together provide 160 mg of the medicine. Taking too much **acetaminophen** may cause liver damage.

If you purchased these medicines before the recall, please note that each tablet of Children's **Tylenol**



Meltaways or Soft Chews contains 80 mg. The

correct number of tablets to give a child can be found on the label under "Drug Facts." Future labeling will list "medicine per tablet 80 mg."

Finding the directions for over-the-counter medicines

A husband and wife, both pharmacists, recently reported a problem with an over-the-counter medicine, **Equate Nite Time**. This is a Wal-Mart brand cold and flu medicine that contains **acetaminophen, dextromethorphan, doxylamine, and pseudoephedrine**. After purchasing the medicine, neither the husband nor wife could find the directions for how to take it on the label. It was only after careful inspection over quite a few minutes that they finally noticed small words on the label printed in red, "Peel back here" (see picture). The label that wrapped around the bottle had to be peeled back to find out how much medicine to take.

If you can't find the directions on how to take a medicine, they may be hidden behind the label in a similar fashion. Don't assume that the dose is the same as other cold and flu medicines. Call your pharmacist if the directions cannot be found. Unfortunately, once the directions are peeled back, the label could tear off. If this happens, use an elastic band to keep the label attached to the medicine container.



Proper insulin mixing

Insulin pens have become a popular way for diabetic people to give themselves **insulin**. However, several years ago, a study published in a medical journal showed that only 9 out of 100 people tipped and rolled their **insulin** pens enough to mix their long-acting **insulin (NPH)** correctly.¹

Every time you use a pen containing **NPH (neutral protamine Hagedorn) insulin**, it must be rolled between the palms 10 times and then tipped up and down 10 times to mix the **insulin** properly. The same mixing process is needed for pens with mixtures of regular and **NPH insulin**. The **insulin** should look uniformly cloudy or milky after mixing. If there are clumps floating in the **insulin**, or white particles stuck to the bottom or sides of the pen giving it a frosted look, don't use it. Otherwise, large doses of **insulin** can come out during the first injection, leaving less in the pen for injections that follow. In fact, the researchers found that poorly mixed **insulin** pens delivered wildly inconsistent doses: from 5% to over 200% of the dose it should have been! As expected, the study showed that people who properly tip and roll their pens have fewer episodes of low blood sugar.¹

If you are unsure exactly how to mix your **insulin** pen, ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse to give you a demonstration. Then practice in front of them until you both agree you've got it! An added note: Vials of **NPH insulin** should also be rolled in the hand and inverted as above to ensure that the medicine is mixed well before injection.

Reference: (1) Jehle et al. Inadequate suspension of NPH insulin in pens. *Lancet* 1999; 354:1604-7.

60-second safety tip

■ **Hot flashes from a heated patch.** An estrogen patch automatically releases the proper dose of medicine over a defined period of time, usually several days. However, women should know that sunbathing with a patch on may speed up how much medicine enters the body. For example, one woman experienced hot flashes after several days of sun tanning while wearing **Climara**, a once-a-week estrogen (**estradiol**) patch. She also noticed dark spots on her skin where her patch had been applied. The heat from the sun may have caused the medicine to be released too quickly, so later in the week, there was no medicine left in the patch. Thus, a sudden drop in her estrogen levels led to the hot flashes—a symptom of menopause that the patch is designed to prevent. The total amount of medicine absorbed by the body can increase during heat exposure for many types of medicine patches. There are also documented cases in which other heat sources such as heating pads, electric blankets, saunas, hot tubs, and heated waterbeds have accounted for inaccurate release of medicine in patches. Until more is known, women who are currently using the **Climara** patch (or other hormone patches such as **Ortho Evra [norelgestromin/ethinyl estradiol]**) should probably avoid prolonged sun exposure in the area of the patch.

Contact Information

 Safe Medicine (ISSN 1550-6282)
©2005 Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP). Reproduction is prohibited without written permission from ISMP. Editors: Judy Smetzer, RN, BSN; Nancy Tuohy, RN, MSN; Michael R. Cohen, RPh, MS, ScD, Russell Jenkins, MD. ISMP, 1800 Byberry Road, Suite 810, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006. Email: consumer@ismp.org. To subscribe, visit: www.ismp.org/consumerarticles.

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