

Six medication myths busted

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Can pain relievers really target a specific part of the body? Are generic medicines inferior to their brand-name counterparts? Are natural medicines always safer than prescription drugs? Can you mix alcohol with a prescription medicine?

A lot of what consumers think they know about the medicines they take might not always be true. Professor Andrew McLachlan, a pharmacist and noted researcher with a special interest in the appropriate use of medicines, will address some widely-believed myths about common medications at a free public talk at University of Sydney on Tuesday, October 14.

"Medicines play an important role in the health and wellbeing of our communities, however consumers need the correct information to use them safely and effectively," Professor McLachlan said.

"Most medicines we take can provide important health benefits, but can also have the potential to be harmful in other ways. Some medicines can have serious side effects, some might interact with other medications, or you might not be taking the correct dose.

"A well informed person can make a judicious and appropriate choice about the medications they decide to take. You have a choice when it comes to medicines, so you need know your options when deciding what medication to take.

"Sometimes we think that because we take a tablet that we can have it all

- eat what we like, don't need to exercise, keep unhealthy lifestyle - but it's not true. Rarely is a simple tablet a magic cure-all.

"Medicines should only be used when needed, however our culture is shifting to a society of over-use, particularly with some medicines like antibiotics. And just because you buy something over-the-counter doesn't mean it doesn't have the potential to have harmful side effects.

"Marketing and advertising can mislead consumers into making purchases that may not be the best for them - physically or financially. For example, consumers can pay a lot more for [pain relievers](#) that claim to work on specific parts of the body, but the truth is they can't target specific types of pain - the labelling is misleading and [consumers](#) are paying more unnecessarily.

"We need to work towards a goal of personalised medicine - the right drug for the right person, with the right information."

Professor McLachlan's 45-minute talk will discuss the origin of popular medication myths, touching on history, popular lore and science, and the evidence that debunks common misconceptions such as:

- Generic medicines don't work as well as brand-name medicines
- Pain relievers can target specific parts of the body
- It's safe because it's 'natural'
- I feel better now - so I can stop taking my medicine
- I'm taking a statin - I can eat what I like
- Alcohol and [prescription medications](#) don't ever mix

Fast facts:

- 87% of Australians over the age of 50 years take one or more

medicines each day with approximately 40% taking five or more medicines daily.

- Nearly 50% of people take complementary and alternative medicines and almost 90% report that they combine complementary and conventional medicines
- Almost 1 in 3 Australians over the age of 50 years take a medicine to lower their cholesterol.

Provided by University of Sydney

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