

Buying Prescription Medicines Online: A Consumer Safety Guide

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/ucm080588.htm>



The internet is rapidly changing the way we live, including how we work and shop. The growth of the internet in recent years has enabled many consumers to purchase medicines online. There are online pharmacies that provide legitimate prescription services. Unfortunately, there are also questionable sites that make purchasing medicines online risky.

POTENTIAL RISKS INCLUDE:

- **Fake, unapproved, outdated, or sub-standard products**
- **Little or no quality control (packaging, purity of ingredients, storage)**
- **Possibility of an incorrect diagnosis (i.e., those sites that inappropriately diagnose and prescribe online)**
- **Obtaining an inappropriate medicine (e.g., inappropriate for condition, interaction with other drugs)**
- **Lack of assurance of confidentiality and security issues**

TO PURCHASE MEDICINES ONLINE SAFELY AND SECURELY, HERE ARE SOME BASIC DO'S AND DON'TS:

• **Meet with Your Doctor to Obtain Any New Prescription**

DO: Take only medications that have been prescribed by your doctor or other authorized health care provider.

DO: Consult with your doctor on whether you need to take any special steps in filling your prescription.

DON'T: Buy online from sites that offer to prescribe a medicine for the first time without a physical exam by your doctor or that sell a prescription medicine without a prescription.

• **Ensure that You are Dealing with a Legitimate Pharmacy**

DO: Buy only from sites that require prescriptions from a physician or other authorized health care provider and that also verify each prescription before dispensing the medication. A written verification policy is usually posted on the site.

DO: Use sites that provide convenient access to a licensed pharmacist who can answer your questions.

DO: Make sure that the site is a licensed pharmacy in good standing in your state. Check with your state board of pharmacy or with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) at www.nabp.net. Some sites display the NABP VIPPS™ (Verified internet Pharmacy Practice Sites) seal, an assurance that such sites are meeting all applicable state and federal requirements.

DON'T: Buy from sites that sell prescription medicines without a prescription.

DON'T: Buy from sites that sell medicines not approved by FDA.

• **Know from Whom You are Buying**

DO: Buy only from U.S.-based sites.

DON'T: Buy from sites without posted customer service policies.

• **Safeguard Your Privacy and Security**

DO: Look for easy-to-find and understand privacy and security policies.

DON'T: Provide any personally identifiable information (social security number, credit card, and health history) unless you are confident that the site will protect them. Make sure the site does not share your information with others without your permission.

• **Trust Your Instincts**

DO: Use common sense when purchasing prescription medications online. Apply the same standards you'd use for any place of business when looking for a reputable pharmacy site.

DON'T: Buy from sites that include undocumented case histories claiming amazing medical results.

• **Take Action to Protect Yourself and Other Consumers**

DO: **Report websites you are not sure of, or if you have complaints about a site.** Go to www.fda.gov/buyonline and click on "Notify FDA about problem websites." If you suspect a site is not a licensed pharmacy, *do not buy from it.*

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