



Buying Prescription Medicine Online: A Consumer Safety Guide

Buying your medicine online can be easy...

make sure you do it safely.



- The Internet has changed the way we shop. We can now buy products without ever leaving home.
- **When it comes to buying medicine online, it is important to be very careful.** Some websites sell medicine that may not be safe. You could put your health at risk.

Some websites that sell medicine:

- aren't pharmacies at all
- may give a diagnosis that is not correct
- may sell medicine that is not right for you or your condition
- won't protect your personal information



Some medicines sold online:



- are fake
- are too strong or too weak
- have dangerous ingredients
- have expired (are out-of-date)
- aren't FDA-approved (haven't been checked for safety and effectiveness)
- aren't safe to use with other medicine or products you use
- aren't labeled, stored, or shipped correctly

MEET AND TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

- **Talk with your doctor** and have a physical exam before you get any new medicine for the first time.
- **Use ONLY medicine that has been prescribed** by your doctor, who is licensed in the U.S. to write prescriptions.
- **Ask your doctor** if there are any special steps you need to take to fill your prescription.



These tips will help protect you if you buy medicines online:



1. **KNOW YOUR SOURCE** to make sure it's safe

Make sure a website is a U.S. state-licensed pharmacy. The Illinois State Board of Pharmacy can tell you if a website is a state-licensed pharmacy in good standing:

Illinois State Board of Pharmacy
320 W Washington, 3rd Floor
Springfield, IL 62786
Phone: 217/782-8556

Look for websites with practices that protect you

A safe website should:

1. **be licensed by the state board of pharmacy** where the website is operating
2. **have a licensed pharmacist** to answer your questions
3. **require a prescription** from your doctor or other health care professional who is licensed in the United States to write prescriptions for medicine
4. **have a way for you to talk to a person** if you have problems



2. BE SURE YOUR PRIVACY IS PROTECTED

Look for privacy and security policies that are easy-to-find and easy-to-understand.

Don't give any personal information (such as social security number, credit card, or medical or health history), unless you are sure the website will keep your information safe and private.

Make sure that the site will not sell your information, unless you agree.



3. PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

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."

**Buying your medicine online can be easy.
Just make sure you do it safely.**

The information contained in this handout is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be used as a replacement for discussion with your health care provider. Speak with your doctor for any specific medical concerns. Always check with your doctor before making any changes with your medication therapy or lifestyle.

Source: Buying Prescription Medicine Online: A Consumer Safety Guide
<http://www.fda.gov/buyonlineguide/> (created: January 11, 2005; Revised March 23, 2005; accessed August 2, 2006)
