



## BUYING MEDICINES AND MEDICAL PRODUCTS ONLINE

*“I want to spend less on medications, but I’m not sure if it is safe to order drugs on the Internet.”*

— Len, 76 year-old writer

With hundreds of drug-dispensing Web sites in business, how can consumers tell which are legitimate, especially given how easy it is to set up a professional-looking site that promises deep discounts or a minimum of hassles?

### Warnings for Consumers

When it comes to buying medicine online, it is important to be very careful. Some Web sites sell medicine that may not be safe to use and could put your health at risk. Be aware of the following dangers:

- You may receive a contaminated or counterfeit product, the wrong product, an incorrect dose (too strong or too weak), an expired (out-of-date) product or no product at all.
- You may take an unsafe or inappropriate medication putting you at risk for dangerous drug interactions and other serious health consequences.
- If you are getting prescription drugs by filling out a questionnaire the health care professional may not have sufficient information to determine if a certain drug is safe, if another treatment is more appropriate, or if you have an underlying medical condition that would cause the drug to be harmful to you. You may be given a diagnosis that is not correct and purchase medicine that is not right for your condition.
- You may receive medicine that was not labeled, stored, or shipped correctly or FDA (US Food and Drug Administration) approved (haven't been checked for safety and effectiveness).
- You may give personal information to a Web site selling medications (such as social security number, credit card, or medical or health history) and this information may not be kept safe and private and even may be sold without your permission.

## Tips to Help Protect You if You Buy Medicines Online

- Check with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) (Phone: 847-391-4406. Web site: [www.nabp.net](http://www.nabp.net)) to determine if a Web site is a licensed pharmacy in good standing. The NABP has a program to help you find some of the pharmacies that are licensed to sell medicine online. Internet Web sites that display the seal of this program have been checked to make sure they meet state and federal rules. For more on this program and a list of pharmacies that display the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ Seal, (VIPPS®Seal), go to the Web site: [www.vipps.info](http://www.vipps.info)
- Don't buy from sites that offer to prescribe a drug for the first time without a physical exam or that sell prescription drugs without a prescription.
- Don't do business with sites that have no access to a registered pharmacist who can answer questions.
- Avoid sites that do not identify with whom you are dealing and do not provide a US address and phone number to contact for any problems.
- Don't purchase from foreign Web sites at this time because it is generally illegal to import drugs, and the US government can do little if you are ripped off.
- Beware of sites that advertise a "new cure" for a serious disorder, a quick cure-all for a wide range of ailments, or undocumented case histories claiming "amazing" results.
- Be careful of sites that might use impressive-sounding terminology to disguise a lack of good science or those that claim the government, the medical profession, or research scientists have conspired to suppress a product.
- Talk to a health-care professional before using any medications for the first time.
- For more information on buying medicines and medical products over the Internet, go to [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

## Report Concerns About Web Sites Or if You Have Complaints About a Web Site

- Go to [www.fda.gov/buyonline](http://www.fda.gov/buyonline) and click on “Notify FDA about problem Web Sites” or call 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332) [toll free].

*This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of specific instructions you receive from your health care providers. For answers to other questions consult your physician or other health care provider.*

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