



Clinic PHARMACY

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Prescription drug advertisements: Choose wisely

All day you've battled allergies. In the evening, you see an ad on TV for a new allergy medication. Should you ask your doctor about it?

"Absolutely," says Robin Molella, M.D., a specialist in internal and preventive medicine at Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn. "Open communication between doctors and patients is always a good idea," she says. But don't expect your doctor to immediately reach for a prescription pad.

Whether the medication is for allergies or other problems, drug companies now bring their messages directly to you. But the watchwords for using any medication new or old are safe and smart.

"Safe" means the medication's benefits outweigh the risks, and the risks are known.

"Smart" means the medication is likely to help when prescribed and used appropriately and is cost-effective.

All medications have risks. Some risks are known, some may not be. Drugs go through clinical trials before Federal Drug Administration approval. Although the trials may involve thousands of people, problems sometimes emerge only after widespread or long-term use.

In recent years, drugs such as dexfenfluramine hydrochloride (Redux), terfenadine (Seldane), cisapride (Propulsid) and cerivastatin (Baycol) have been withdrawn because of the potential for serious side effects. Others have remained but with increased precautions for their use. Sildenafil citrate (Viagra), for example, was found to cause potentially fatal interactions with some heart medications (nitroglycerin-containing products).

To decide if a drug is right for you, you and your doctor may discuss:

- Your current medical concern
- Your medical history
- Other prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements you may be taking
- Known drug side effects
- Other possible treatments

Cost

The latest drug you see advertised may not be right for you. Work closely with your doctor to determine which medication is the best choice for your situation.