



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Forget the colour, shape or brand: it's the active ingredient that counts

Knowing the active ingredient in your medicine can be critical to avoiding accidentally taking more medicine than you need.

Each year more than 140,000 people are admitted to hospital because of problems with their medicine, many of which could have been avoided through better knowledge about their medicine.

The active ingredient in a medicine is what provides the therapeutic effect, i.e. what makes the medicine work in the body. Most medicines are known by the brand name rather than the active ingredient, and can be marketed under several different brand names.

"When you purchase a prescription or non prescription medicine you might be offered a different brand to what you have used before," NPS CEO Dr Lynn Weekes said.

"Many people identify their medicines by colour and shape, but if you switch brands and the medicine doesn't look exactly the same, you could mistakenly think it's something different. By not identifying the active ingredient you might accidentally end up taking a double dose or not enough of it."

For example, many cold and flu medicines contain an active ingredient which provides pain relief. Some people take paracetamol or ibuprofen in addition to this without realising they are taking a double dose.

GP and media personality, Dr John D'Arcy says many problems relating to medicine mix-ups are due to dosage mistakes.

"I've seen many patients who have become unwell because they took too much or too little of their medicine, or they took it at the wrong time. Get to know your medicines – learn what the active ingredient is, and start a **Medicines List** to keep track of all the medicines you are taking," Dr D'Arcy said.

To help people quickly identify the active ingredient in prescription medicines, NPS has developed the **NPS Medicine Name Finder**. When a brand name is entered into the online tool, the active ingredient name appears, and when the active ingredient is entered its brand names appear.

People are then prompted to record their medicine details on a downloadable **Medicines List** or print the information. A link is also provided to the **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflet which contains more details about the medicine. The Medicine Name Finder can also be saved as a google gadget to your desktop so you can access it with one click.

"The safest way to manage your medicines is to keep a Medicines List and show it to your doctor and pharmacist each visit. Ask them to point out the important information on the medicine label. This also provides a second check for the health professional to ensure they have prescribed or dispensed the correct dosage," Dr Weekes said.

NPS Medicines Lists and the NPS Medicine Name Finder are available to download for free at www.npsactiveingredient.org.au.

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