



Do you understand the directions on your Rx medicine label?

Approximately 46% of American adults do not.

A prescription label says to “Take two tablets by mouth twice daily.” Sounds simple, doesn’t it?

But patients have understood this to mean:

- Take it every 8 hours
- Take it every day
- Take one every 12 hours

Better directions might be “Take 2 tablets by mouth at 8 in the morning, and take 2 tablets at 9 at night.”

FACT: Six out of 10 people have taken their medicines incorrectly, due to:

- confusing directions on the container label,
- poor health literacy (the ability to read, understand, and act on healthcare information), and
- inability to read and/or understand directions written in English of those whose first language is not English.

FACT: Medicine errors are among the most common medical errors, harming at least 1.5 million people every year. More than one third of these take place outside a hospital in a home setting, costing close to \$1 billion annually.

FACT: Up to one-half of all medicines are taken incorrectly or mixed with other medicines that can cause dangerous reactions that can lead to injury and death.

Medicine-related errors must be reduced. One way to begin is by providing patients with easy to read and understand prescription container labeling. This can be a giant step toward increasing consumer protection and improving the health, safety, and well-being of consumers.

California recognizes the importance of improving medicine container labels. In 2007, the Legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger enacted Senate Bill 472, mandating the Board of Pharmacy to develop requirements for standardized, patient-centered, prescription drug labels on all prescription medicine dispensed to patients in California.

In 2008, the Board will hold statewide public meetings to consult with patients and health providers to improve prescription container labels. The meetings will focus on improving directions for the drug’s use, using better type fonts and sizes, and placement of information that is patient-centered. The needs of senior citizens and patients with limited English reading skills also will be identified.

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