Avoid Sharing Your Medications

Sharing any type of prescription medications with another person is dangerous. It's a federal offense, punishable by prison time and substantial fines. It's a big deal, yet many of us are not aware of that fact when offering one of our medications to a friend or family member.

Granted, sometimes the goal of the sharing is for a "high," especially in the case of painkillers. But many times, the offer is well-intentioned:

- We feel bad for someone's condition and want to help.
- We agree to tide the person over until they get to the doctor or pharmacy to get their own medications.
- And we want to save the person the hassle or expense of going to the doctor.

In addition to the legal consequences of sharing our medications, there are significant health and safety risks as well. Here's the problem…

- The user does not have any of the labeling or accompanying information that outlines the risks and precautions of taking the medications.
- The user could be allergic to the medication or could be taking something else that could trigger a negative reaction.
- The user might have a medical condition that would be masked or worsened by the use of a shared drug.
- Dosing is an issue, as a doctor considers gender, age, weight, symptoms, and other patient information when deciding how much the patient should take. This is especially significant with children, as many medications are only recommended or approved for adult use.

We also need to be sure that we don't share medications…by accident. Meaning, they're taken without our knowledge or consent. Over 40% of people who misuse prescription pain relievers, and more than half of people who misuse prescription stimulants, get them from a friend or relative.

One way to avoid contributing to the problem is to store your medications carefully and appropriately.

1. Keep your prescription medications in a secure location, preferably in a lock box.
2. Consider a place other than the bathroom. Not only is it an obvious place for a person to look, but medications can also be damaged by humidity and changing temperatures in the bathroom.
3. Keep them out of sight and reach of children.
4. Store them in their original containers.
5. Keep a close count of your inventory, especially painkillers and other drugs that are commonly abused.
6. When traveling, pack medications in a carry-on bag instead of a checked suitcase.

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