

Whenever medication is used, then...

...please note the following points:

- Children and, as a rule, adolescents should only be given non-prescription medicines on the recommendation of a specialist (doctor/physician, pharmacist).
- Specialists must be informed about all other medicines taken (asthma medicine, Ritalin, etc.).
- Never change the recommended dose or the duration of medication without consulting a specialist.
- If side effects become apparent, or if the symptoms worsen, seek expert advice.
- Never give your child the whole packet of medicine, only individual tablets.
- Even non-prescription medicines should always be kept out of the reach of children.
- Never give medicines that were prescribed for you to other people.
- All these tips apply equally to medicines bought outside Switzerland.
- Buying medicines on the Internet, should only be done with great caution. There is no consultation, and there is a risk that the contents are not as indicated on the packet or even that the medicine contains harmful substances.

Advice and Information

www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch The addiction prevention centres in Canton Zurich provide online information, a self-test for drug use, and personal advice.

www.zuefam.ch The Zurich centre for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse is specialised in this topic.

www.suchtschweiz.ch "Addiction Switzerland" offers in-depth online information, assorted brochures, and advice via e-mail and telephone.

www.medi-info.ch The Swiss medicines information centre offers consultations. Tel: 0900 573 554 (CHF 1.49 per minute, German, French)

www.ajb.zh.ch/kjz The child and youth help centres in Canton Zurich advise families on various educational issues.

www.elternbildung.zh.ch The parents education service offers events and courses on child-raising and family issues in all regions of Canton Zurich.

Various handbooks on how to deal with children's illnesses, such as those from the publisher Beobachter Verlag, are available in bookstores.

Orders

This leaflet, and other addiction prevention leaflets for parents (in several languages) can be downloaded or ordered from www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch/Publikationen → Informationsmaterial → Familie or ordered by phone: 044 634 49 99.

Orders within Canton Zurich are free.

This leaflet is available in several languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, English, French, German, Persian, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Tigrinya, Thai and Turkish. See above for ordering address.

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Medication with children and adolescents

Responsible use in everyday life

Tips for Parents

Englisch

Die Stellen für Suchtprävention
im Kanton Zürich

Like adults, children and adolescents, occasionally suffer from complaints such as headaches, stomach pains or insomnia. When treating them, medicines should be used with the utmost care to prevent addiction.

Medicines affect children differently

Adults frequently take non-prescription medicines for minor ailments such as headaches or digestive problems. Such drugs do not necessarily affect children and adolescents in the same way because their physical development is incomplete and they have a lower body mass. Certain medicines can even have a harmful effect on children. Therefore no medicine should be given to children without the professional advice of a pharmacist or doctor and without carefully reading the instruction leaflet.

Learn a low-risk approach

In Switzerland, more than 60,000 people are addicted to medicines. Sleeping pills, sedatives and painkillers containing benzodiazepine or opioids in particular can be highly addictive. Addiction always has many causes; in addition to the active ingredient, habit is also a risk factor. If children learn to take medicine as soon as they feel unwell, this may favour the future development of addiction. Children learn these undesirable patterns of behaviour if they are given medicine relatively often, even for minor complaints, and/or when adults themselves quickly resort to the frequent use of medication. Children observe the behaviour of adults and take it as their role model. This is also the case with homeopathic medicines or placebos (medicines without active ingredients).

Treating minor ailments

a) Children

Most children find it difficult to describe their ailments clearly. Toddlers often call any discomfort “tummy ache”, even if they mean something quite different. Feeling unwell often has no medical basis, but is caused by stress, fatigue, lack of exercise, conflict with other children or other psychological stress. Extra attention and affection, or home remedies like tea or a poultice, can often help if your child feels unwell. Getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, and plenty of play and exercise are also important for your child’s wellbeing. It is always worth talking to your child so that together you can find out the cause of the complaint.

If you are unsure of what is wrong with your child, it is worth talking with other caregivers (crèche or nursery staff, teachers, grandparents, etc.). If the complaint persists, you should consult a specialist (doctor/physician, pharmacist, parent counsellor, psychologist).

b) Adolescents

Administering medicines for minor ailments in adolescence is somewhat less problematic than in childhood; adolescents can describe their symptoms better, and their physical development is more advanced. However, information for specific age groups for each medicine must always be followed.

Adolescent girls often take medication for the first time because of menstrual discomfort. This can be helpful and appropriate, but here too expert advice from the pharmacist or from a doctor/physician is important.

For both boys and girls, parents should keep track of their adolescent children’s consumption of medicines, and discuss with them about it. Sometimes young people order drugs for themselves on the Internet (e.g., Viagra or cough syrup with intoxicating side-effects). Let your child know that drugs should never be ordered on the Internet because fake drugs are sometimes sold online and this is dangerous.

Anxiety about exams, nervousness, sleep problems or a dip in performance should not normally be treated with medication. Medicines only treat symptoms, and have the added danger of developing dependence. Depending on the individual child and circumstances, other measures can be helpful. Sometimes it helps just to have „nothing“ to do, while regular exercise (without pressure) helps some, or relaxation techniques or psychological counselling are sometimes useful. Try networking with other parents, and get professional advice from a specialist (psychologist, teacher, doctor/physician).

What parents can do

- Ask questions when your child feels unwell, and try to find out the cause together.
- If possible, over-the-counter medicines should not be used unless recommended by a specialist.
- Attention, affection, adequate sleep, rest and exercise, and a healthy diet are often helpful against feeling unwell.
- Observe your child so that you can find out what does him or her good. Give them time to get over their ailments.
- Take your responsibility as a role model seriously, and have a low-risk approach to medicines yourself.
- If you are uncertain, ask specialists for advice (doctor/physician, pharmacist, parent counsellor, psychologist).
- If you suspect that your child is taking medicine without your consent – for example to calm down, to enhance performance or to become intoxicated – have a chat about it and tell him or her about the risks. Get help from specialists if you feel unsure or if it is impossible to discuss with your child.