

# An 8-Step Check List for Medicine Safety

The Partnership for **SAFE MEDICINES**  
#SAFEMEDICINES.org

## S.A.F.E. D.R.U.G

is a “how-to” guide to help consumers identify and protect against counterfeit medicines.

This eight-step check list helps consumers judge whether their medications are safe and provides tips on what to do if a drug has been compromised.



*The Partnership for Safe Medicines is committed to helping consumers assure that the prescription drugs they are taking are safe and effective.*

*The S.A.F.E. D.R.U.G. guide was originally developed by Bryan A. Liang, MD, PhD, JD of the Institute of Health Law Studies, California Western School of Law and the San Diego Center for Patient Safety, UCSD School of Medicine, and refined with the Partnership for Safe Medicines.*

**Sample:** Request samples of your medications from your physician when first having a medication prescribed in order to compare the appearance, taste, texture, and reaction later to medications filled through the doctor's prescription. Manufacturer samples are usually only available for brand name medications and not generics. When available, samples will help patients establish a “baseline” of product characteristics. Save the sample's packaging for future comparison. If using the Internet to purchase drugs, make sure the Web site is a “VIPPS” certified site. For a listing of approved sites, see: [www.nabp.net/vipps/consumer/listall.asp](http://www.nabp.net/vipps/consumer/listall.asp). Please note that generics may differ in shape or color and still be a safe and effective product. For specific questions on identification of medications, talk to your pharmacist.

**Appearance:** Compare the prescription medicine you receive with what it is supposed to look like by taking pictures of the original manufacturer's drug and all associated packaging. You can also find pictures in the Physicians Desk Reference available at your local library. When comparing packaging, look for differences in paper, printing (is it the same size, raised print, embossed, etc.), color, and fonts.

**Feel:** Take note of the prescription drug's taste and any associated feeling once you take it. For example, if injecting a medication, is it supposed to burn? Is there anything unusual in your body's reaction compared to previous experiences?

**Evaluate:** How is your body reacting over the course of treatment? Do you feel that you are benefiting from the medication? Is your condition improving, stabilizing, or reverting back to ill health? Ask your doctor or pharmacist what you should expect to feel and when you should expect to begin feeling relief or improvement. Remember: counterfeit drugs can contain no active ingredient, not enough, or too much.

**Doctor:** If your drugs do not seem to have the same taste or if you feel different than usual, immediately write down your symptoms and contact your doctor and pharmacist.

**Report:** If you have any concerns about your drugs, or have confirmed there is a difference in packaging, labeling, or pills, you should immediately contact the pharmacy where you purchased them. You may also want to contact the FDA and the manufacturer of the medication to report your concerns. The FDA can be contacted by calling toll-free **1-800-FDA-1088 (800-332-1088)**, or on the Web at [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch).

**Unavailable:** If you confirm that your medicine has been compromised, immediately remove it from your medicine cabinet, mark the packaging with a red pen, and put tape around the top of the drug container so that it will be unavailable to you or others in your family. It is important that you and any family members do not confuse this medication with any legitimate prescription drugs you may be taking. Take the medications to your local law enforcement officials or contact the FDA for more information.

**Gather:** Gather all the information you can find related to how you got the counterfeit medication and how long you have been taking it. One of the key issues is where you purchased the medication. Was it from the Internet, from a mail order, or from a local pharmacy? When did you purchase the medication? Do you still have the packaging? How long have you been taking the counterfeit drugs? If the medication must be taken routinely, you should also contact your physician or pharmacist to arrange for a new supply so that you can resume taking your medication.