

Checking medicine labels

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To understand the specialist language used on medicine labels and patient information leaflets inside the medicine package
- To understand instructions and contraindications on medicine labels and leaflets
- To understand the expiry date



RESOURCES

- Empty packaging and containers for a variety of tablets, mixtures, drops, powders, creams, etc.
- Medicine packet and patient information leaflet on a PowerPoint
- Copies of Resources 1, 2, 3A, 4, 6
- Prompt cards prepared from Resource 3B (Activity 1 Support)
- Resource 2 on a PowerPoint

- Cards with definitions of side-effects to be devised by teacher (Activity 3 ESOL)
- Date cards prepared from Resource 5

RELATED TOPICS

- Remembering spoken instructions (Theme 12, Topic 3)
- Dosage and timing (Theme 12, Topic 5)
- Prescriptions (Theme 9, Topic 3)

HEALTH SKILLS

If medicines are to work they must be taken correctly. Patients also need to understand when they should not take the medicine (contraindications such as pregnancy). Medicine labels and packets give a lot of important information about the safe use of the medicine. They also contain a lot of specialist words or phrases that need to be understood in order for the instructions to be followed correctly.

This topic deals with reading information on labels and in patient information leaflets, including checking the expiry date. It leads into the next theme, 'Dosage and timing.'

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

In order to find what they need to know from the range of information included on medicine labels and leaflets, learners need to:

- understand what information can be found on a label or leaflet
- practise finding specific information
- understand the format and language used.

Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

Activities in this topic will contribute to learning in the following curriculum areas:

- find key information on different medicine labels **English** E3.12 (**L**Rt/E3.5)
English E3.9 (**L**Rt/E3.7)
- understand specialist words used on medicine labels **English** E3.8 (**L**Rw/E3.1)
- read specific health and safety information in detail **English** E3.10 (**L**Rt/E3.8)
- understand the different ways expiry dates are recorded on medicine labels **Maths** L1.20 (**N**MSS1/L1.2).

- Ask learners about their experiences of buying over-the-counter (i.e. non-prescription) medicines for themselves or others.
- Do a quick class survey of 'popular' medicines. Are headache tablets bought more often than cough mixture? etc.
- Hold up the packaging from different types of medicine one item at a time and ask learners to guess generally what each one is (e.g. cough mixture, cold remedy, headache tablets, cream, etc.).
- Discuss the basis of learners' guesses – recognising the brand name, the shape of the packaging or container, experience of taking similar medicines, advertisements, etc.
- Discuss the difference between buying over-the-counter medicines and using prescribed ones.

What sort of medicine do you buy most often?

What sort of medicines can you buy without a prescription?

ACTIVITY 1

Find information about the purpose of a medicine

- Before giving out Resource 1, ask learners about the things they might want to check before taking a medicine or giving it to someone else.
- Use the questions in the thought-bubbles on Resource 1 to stimulate a discussion of the sorts of useful or important information learners would expect to find on medicine packets or labels. Write these ideas on the board/flipchart.
- Show learners an example of a medicine packet and the patient information leaflet from it on a PowerPoint. Explain that the information and instructions on the packet are also found in the leaflet. The leaflet is often written in larger writing and gives you extra or more detailed information. Compare the two side by side to see what information is included on the packet and the leaflet.
- Discuss why all medicines show the warning to keep medicines out of reach of children. Discuss where learners store their medicines at home.
- Describe a scenario in which you have a headache and are looking in your medicine cupboard for tablets. Ask learners how they would check that they had the appropriate tablets.
- Give each pair or group a copy of Resource 2 and ask them to highlight what the medicine can be taken for. They can then either record this information using the tick list on Resource 3A or write in the answers on the blank card.
- Go through learners' lists and make sure they understand the terms used.

How do you store your medicines at home?

Support

- Use the prompt cards prepared from Resource 3B with learners, reading them out one by one and giving learners the chance to find the word on the packet.
- Guide learners to the appropriate information on the packet and read it.

ESOL

Ask learners to highlight words for health conditions (e.g. headache) on the medicine packet (Resource 2). They can then check their meaning with other learners or in a bilingual dictionary if necessary.

Explain any medical terms that have a similar meaning to the conditions shown on the cards.

- Alternatively, demonstrate the physical symptoms of each condition clearly, indicating the parts of the body affected (e.g. a pain in the stomach) and ask them to match to the conditions on the packet.
- Encourage learners to add the new words to their personal glossaries.

ACTIVITY 2

Identify who a medicine is suitable for and any contraindications

- Ask learners to look at the medicine packet on Resource 2 for a few seconds and then discuss what information stands out. Write their ideas on the board/flipchart (these might include colours, capital letters, bold writing, etc.). Point out examples of each on the PowerPoint showing a copy of the packet.
- Discuss why these different formats make information stand out, and the sort of information they give.
- Using learners' ideas, summarise the discussion by pointing out how these different formats can be used to make important information stand out.
- Ask learners to look at the parts in bold under 'Dosage'. Ask them about the meaning of the dash (e.g. in 9–12 years). Then ask questions that require them to interpret this information (e.g. 'How many tablets should you give to a 12-year-old child?' 'Could you give this medicine to a 3-year-old child? How do you know?').
- Discuss the meaning of the phrase 'not suitable for', then ask questions that require them to interpret this information.
- Draw learners' attention to the contraindications in the red warning box. Discuss why it is important to check that the medicine is suitable if you have or are in a certain condition (e.g. pregnant). Emphasise that you should always seek the advice of a doctor or pharmacist if you are unsure about whether to take a particular medicine.
- Test learners' understanding by asking questions about the information.
- Remind learners that prescribed medicines should only be taken by the person they are prescribed for.

What information can you find on a medicine label, packet or leaflet?

Are all medicines suitable for everyone? Why not?

Do you know anyone who can't take certain medicines?

What should you do if you are breastfeeding and you want to take this medicine?

Support

Read the instructions aloud for learners to follow on the packet. Ensure that they understand the words and the written conventions used. For example, the meaning of the dash as 'between, and including, the ages of'.

ESOL

- Check learners are familiar with words for describing different formats and text types (headings, bold, capital letters, etc.). Provide examples to demonstrate meaning.
- Encourage learners to record key words and phrases in their personal glossaries (e.g. 'do not exceed ...', 'not suitable for ...', 'if symptoms persist ...'). Learners can add their own explanations in everyday words or in their own language.

ACTIVITY 3

Find information about side-effects and follow instructions

- Write the term 'side-effects' on the board/flipchart and discuss what learners understand by it.
- Ask them to find this term on the packet on Resource 2 – perhaps by using a straight edge (e.g. ruler or edge of sheet of paper) to track quickly down the information, line by line. When they've found it, ask how many side-effects are given. Write these on the board/flipchart.
- Discuss what each side-effect means, asking learners to put it in simpler terms (e.g. nausea means feeling sick). Encourage learners to offer their own meanings where they know the word, or offer alternative meanings for them to choose from.
- Point out the conditional instruction 'If any of these occur ...'. Ask learners what they should do if the person taking the tablets has any of these side-effects. Write the two instructions separately on the board/flipchart.
- Check that learners understand the phrase 'consult your doctor'.

What does the term 'side-effects' mean?

Do you know what palpitations are? How could you find out?

What would you do if you had palpitations after taking this medicine?

Support

- Make sure learners understand how the two instructions are separated by the word 'and' on the medicine packet.
- Learners may need further support with the meaning of specialist words. They may prefer to write the meaning into more colloquial language as a personal reminder.

ESOL

- Write simple definitions for the side-effects on cards or sticky labels. Give out the cards and ask learners to find the medical word with the same meaning on the medicine packet.
- Check learners are able to pronounce the words by saying them aloud and asking learners to repeat.

ACTIVITY 4

Understand expiry dates on medicines

- Display Resource 2 and point out the instructions at the bottom 'Do not use beyond expiry date (see top of box)'. Ask learners to find this date on the packet; point out where it is on the PowerPoint version.
- Discuss what 'expiry date' means. Explain that, like food, medicines have a date on them that tells you when they are past their best. Unlike food, however, it usually means the medicines will not work as well after this date rather than they have 'gone off' (although this can happen to syrups or mixtures).
- Suggest that learners look for these dates on the other medicine packaging. Note down the way in which dates are written and abbreviations for 'expiry date' on the board/flipchart.
- Go through each date, discussing how it shows the combination of the day (not always shown), month and year. Make sure learners are clear about the British convention of writing dates as day/month/year. (You may want to point out that there are different ways of writing dates in different cultures, for example in the USA dates are written month/day/year.)

What does the term 'expiry date' mean?

- Give each learner a copy of Resource 4 and suggest that they add any other abbreviations for months that they have come across on the medicine packaging.
- Write further examples of dates on the board and ask learners to say what the full date is.
- Give learners the sets of cards prepared from Resource 5 to match up the pairs of dates. They can work in pairs or small groups.
- You might want to extend this activity by asking learners to sort the dates into order.

Support

- Learners may need support as they match the different date formats. Resource 4 provides a useful guide.
- Read out each date in numbers (e.g. 06 07) so that they hear it pronounced, and ask direct questions about each part.

ESOL

- Make sure learners understand the wording of instructions such as 'do not use beyond ...' and 'see top of box'. Suggest that they add these to the list of useful expressions in their personal glossaries.
- You may need to remind learners of the UK convention for writing dates.

TIP

When writing dates, use today's date and relevant dates for learners to recognise (e.g. birth dates, festival dates).

Action

- Give each learner a copy of Resource 6 and read through the questions. Explain to learners that they are to choose a medicine that they have at home and answer the questions based on the information on the packaging.
- Learners who do not have medicines at home could use the empty medicine packets used during the session.
- Learners can choose whether they write on the question sheet or note the information elsewhere. They should answer as many questions as they can.
- More confident learners could compare two types of medicine or look for similar information on the patient information leaflet that comes with the medicines.

*What information is on **your** medicine at home?*

Is there additional information in the leaflets that is important to you?

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RESOURCE 1

There are some key things that you need to think about and check before taking a medicine or giving it to someone else.

Is it the right medicine for the problem?

Is it suitable for the person taking it?

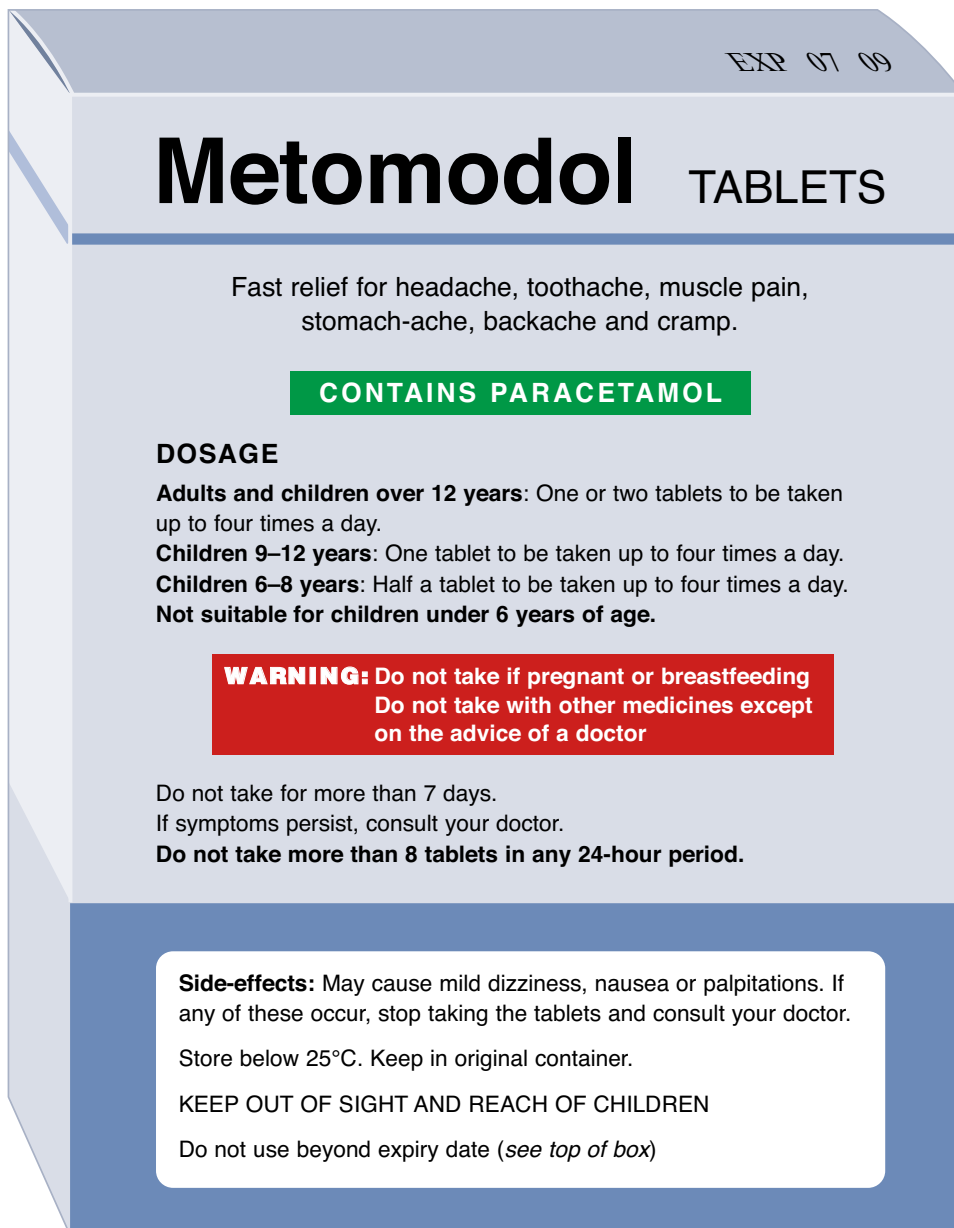


Are there any side-effects?

Is it still in date?

Keep all medicines out of the sight and reach of children.

All medicines contain a warning similar to this.
You **must** follow this instruction.



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RESOURCE 3A

This medicine is for:

headache	<input type="checkbox"/>	stomach-ache	<input type="checkbox"/>
earache	<input type="checkbox"/>	cough	<input type="checkbox"/>
cold	<input type="checkbox"/>	indigestion	<input type="checkbox"/>
muscle pain	<input type="checkbox"/>	backache	<input type="checkbox"/>
rash	<input type="checkbox"/>	hay fever	<input type="checkbox"/>
sunburn	<input type="checkbox"/>	cramp	<input type="checkbox"/>
toothache	<input type="checkbox"/>	sore throat	<input type="checkbox"/>

This medicine is for:

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RESOURCE 3B

headache

stomach-ache

toothache

earache

backache

cough

cold

muscle pain

indigestion

hay fever

sunburn

rash

sore throat

cramp

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RESOURCE 4

Month	Abbreviations			Number
January	Jan			01
February	Feb			02
March	Mar			03
April	Apr			04
May	May			05
June	Jun			06
July	July			07
August	Aug			08
September	Sep			09
October	Oct			10
November	Nov			11
December	Dec			12

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RESOURCE 5

06 19

December 2022

11/10/18

November 2020

11/2020

September 2021

1 JUL 19

June 2019

01/18

11th October
2018

12/2022

1st July 2019

09-2021

January 2018

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What is the medicine for?

Who can take it?

Who should not take it?

What are the possible side-effects?

What should you do if you get any side-effects?

What date is it past its best?

(Write this in full, for example November 2020.)

There are no audio scripts for this topic.

ACTIVITY 1 / Resource 3

The medicine is for:

- headache
- toothache
- muscle pain
- stomach-ache
- backache
- cramp.

ACTIVITY 4 / Resource 5

The dates, in order, are:

01/18 = January 2018

11/10/18 = 11th October 2018

06 19 = June 2019

1 JUL 19 = 1st July 2019

11/2020 = November 2020

09-2021 = September 2021

12/2022 = December 2022