

Self Prescribing from the internet – What could go wrong?



Self Prescribing from the internet is fraught with danger. There is so much information available on the internet right now, as well too many opportunities to purchase “miracle cures”. Many people self prescribe according to “Dr Google” but this can be very dangerous.

For example:

- Desiccated thyroid extract purchased from international sites for hypothyroidism. Without taking the correct dosage and constantly measuring thyroid hormone levels, a person can easily throw their body into an opposite, and extreme hyperthyroid state. This can lead to side effects such as crippling anxiety, paranoia and mood swings, not to mention hair loss, excessive sweating and insomnia.
- Even more common is the self administration of iron when people feel tired. Many other things can cause tiredness, plus there are types of anaemia not related to iron levels. Taking iron when you already have good levels is dangerous and can directly damage the liver and nerves and increase the risk of heart attack.
- Some magic bullets for depression and mood disorders can throw out your balance of neurotransmitters making your situation dangerously



worse, or adding other problems such as anxiety, aggression or phobias.

– Even seemingly innocent vitamin supplements can be dangerous if not correctly assessed for the amounts present and accounting for amounts that may already be obtained from other supplements. For example vitamin A in excess of 700mcg retinol equivalents per day may lead to birth defects in pregnant women and excessive amounts of the trace mineral selenium can be toxic.

– Cheap, bulk purchase fish oils usually are partially oxidized meaning the quality and quantity of EPA and DHA is significantly lower and the capsules are probably causing more damage than good. They are also usually high in contaminants such as mercury.

Therapeutic Goods Administration

One problem with supplements bought on the internet is that they are not approved by the TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration) which is a department set up by the Australian Government to ensure that health products manufactured, prescribed and sold in Australia are registered, regulated and meet safety standards.

Quite often, herbs purchased on the internet don't contain the correct species of herb in the correct quantities or even from the correct part of the plant. They may also contain dangerous, undisclosed excipients such as heavy metals and other contaminants. In Australia we are very lucky to have a number of manufacturers of safe, Practitioner Only products which have been TGA approved and have passed potentially hundreds of quality control steps.

Qualified Naturopaths

When you see a qualified naturopath, you can be sure you are being correctly prescribed TGA approved, practitioner quality brands of herbs and supplements. They will work with you to discover why your body is not functioning correctly, what is causing your tiredness or why your iron levels may be low, and will give carefully considered dosages of natural herbs and supplements to help your body heal itself. They will know what herbs/drugs/nutrients may interact and should not be taken together and what supplements will be contraindicated in pregnancy, with high blood pressure or any other conditions in which you should be aware of possible interactions.

Note: Always check that your naturopath is qualified and that they have been accepted as a member of an industry association. There is currently nothing stopping unqualified people calling themselves Naturopaths. This makes them potentially very dangerous, giving qualified naturopaths who have studied for at least 3 years, a bad name.