

If You are Considering Buying Medications Over the Internet (#40)

RESOLVE supports consumers in their efforts to secure safe and effective medications at the best prices. As more pharmacies are offering medications on-line and some consumers are considering getting their medications from foreign countries, consumers need to consider carefully these sources. **Be aware that the FDA may enforce (through confiscation) its prohibitions against the illegal importation of non-FDA regulated drugs from abroad, including several infertility medications (see Tips and Warnings for Consumers at www.fda.gov/oc/buyonline or www.fda.gov/ora/import/purchasing_medications.htm).** Also, check with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, www.nabp.net, to see if a pharmacy's web site is a licensed pharmacy in good standing. In addition, consider the following questions when selecting a reputable, on-line pharmacy or ordering drugs from a pharmacy outside the United States:

1. Ask for a written confirmation that the pharmacy you are considering is licensed to operate and to deliver medications in the state in which you live.
2. Ask for the names of the pharmacists and the countries and states in which they are licensed to practice.
3. Is the pharmacy located in the United States? (There are FDA regulations about drugs that may only be sold in the U.S.) Ask for the address and phone number of the pharmacy.
4. Does the on-line pharmacy require a valid, current prescription before the pharmacy will fill the prescription? Also ask how that prescription needs to be sent to the pharmacy (fax, e-mail, etc.)
5. Is the drug your doctor prescribed dispensed exactly as written on the prescription, including the IUs (international units)?
6. Ask if there is a minimum required order?
7. Does the pharmacy allow consumers to communicate directly with a licensed pharmacist? Ask for the name of the pharmacist.
8. Does the pharmacy require a valid, current prescription before the pharmacy will fill the prescription? Also ask how that prescription needs to be sent to the pharmacy (fax, e-mail, etc.)
9. Is the pharmacy aware of other medications you are currently taking so that they can advise you about any possible interactions? Is the pharmacy aware of any drug allergies that you have?
10. Does the pharmacy provide detailed information about storage and side effects for each medication which they ship to you?
11. If the medication needs to be kept at a certain temperature, how does the pharmacy assure this need during shipping?

12. Will you need to be at home to receive the medication? If not, will it be left and exposed to high or low temperatures and could someone else take the medication from your mailbox? This is particularly important if syringes and needles are shipped by mail.
13. How are refills handled?
14. If you have to fill out a questionnaire on-line, read and respond personally to each question. Beware of responses that are provided by default.
15. Consider privacy issues and ask if your name, e-mail address, etc., are ever sold or lent to other organizations or businesses.
16. Ask about the pharmacy's policy for replacing any vials damaged in shipping.
17. Be aware that if the drug is imported from a foreign country, you can only bring in enough for your own personal use.
18. Inquire about how insurance coverage for medications is handled.
19. Ask if there is a one-time administrative fee or additional charges.
20. Ask about state taxes, custom fees and shipping costs and which credit cards are accepted.
21. Compare the total costs of using an Internet pharmacy or pharmacies outside the USA versus a local pharmacy.

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