

Just Say No to Too Many Drugs



PHOTO BY ELENA RAY

Approximately 130 million Americans swallow, inject or inhale prescribed medications every month.

Handy Tips

- Keep a dated list of all your medications.
- Talk to your doctor about everything you take: drugs, herbs, supplements.
- Ask the pharmacist about the meds: interactions, side effects, problems, etc.
- See if you can eliminate any unnecessary drugs.

Watch some TV ads and you might think you need a pill. Americans fill more prescriptions than any other country, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Comedian Chris Rock has a great stand-up routine focused on the omnipresent television drug commercials, called direct-to-consumer drug ads, particularly those which “keep naming symptoms until they get one that the viewer’s convinced he/she has got.”

Sometimes, Rock says, the advertisements don’t even inform you precisely what the pill supposedly does. He goes on, “The voice-over just keeps naming symptoms: ‘Are you depressed? Do your teeth hurt?’”

Then he mentions one commercial which might ask: “Do you go to bed at night and wake up in the morning?” Rock adds, “I got that. I’m sick. I need that pill!”

Overmedicating Americans

Some consumer health watchdog agencies believe drug companies are creating false needs in healthy persons, promoting their drugs for long-term use in basically healthy people. These direct-to-consumer drug ads generate hefty profits for the drug companies.

From grade school students to senior citi-

zens, we take lots of pills. Drugs can interact with one another, cause serious side effects and even be fatal. Last year, 125,000 Americans died from drug reactions. That makes the pharmaceutical industry the fourth leading national cause of death after heart disease, cancer and stroke.

Why Do We Do It?

There are many reasons. The average American is older, heavier, with more hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, osteoporosis and arthritis than a generation ago—all conditions effectively treated with medications. I asked my no-nonsense, compassionate neurologist, “Dr. Z,” his view. He reflected, “Some think taking a pill is the fast and easy way to health, relief of obesity, pain, etc. People do not want to work at staying healthy over the long haul.”

We may take too many pills because we do not manage our medications carefully. We might not talk to our doctor about all of our prescriptions or we may ignore dosage instructions. We may self-diagnose and take additional over-the-counter medications.

While we can’t eliminate all medications, we need to act wisely. Jesus declares, “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours” (Luke 6:20).

Placing our lives in God’s hands might temper over-concern for our self and our obsession with health. If we accept ourselves as God sees us, we might simplify our lives by taking only the needed medications directed by our doctors.

The 19th-century American physician Oliver Wendell Holmes said: “If all the drugs were thrown in the ocean, everyone would be better-off...except for the fish.” ☐



Sister Karen Zielinski, O.S.F., is director of Canticle Studio, for products which focus on spirituality and health. She can be contacted at mageditors@FranciscanMedia.org.