

Self-medication is a danger to your health

It is often easier to avoid the cost and hassle of visiting a doctor and use over-the-counter medication. Unfortunately, there are consequences associated with self-medicating that are not worth the risks.

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KAMPALA: Joyce Kisaky, a social worker, one day left her place of work with a cold. On her way home, she went to a pharmacy and was shown several antibiotics. She recalls that since she felt weak and just wanted to rest, she pointed to one that looked colourful. Upon reaching home, she swallowed the tablets and slept.

However, when she woke up the following morning, she felt worse. She was weaker, the cold had intensified and she could not breathe well. She visited a doctor who told her that she was allergic to and was reacting negatively to the antibiotic she had swallowed.

Kisaky is just one of the many people who have suffered side effects of self-medication.

Definition

Dr Nathan Onyach, the director Masaka Regional Referral Hospital, refers to self-medication as the practice of using prescriptions or over-the-counter drugs without discussing your symptoms with a medical doctor. He explains that the individual acts as his or her own physician in an effort to handle the symptoms of a physical or mental health concern.

Why self-medicate?

The reasons that individuals may decide to self-medicate can depend on their personal situation. Dr Onyach states that individuals may attempt to hide their current condition in plain sight or may be using a substance to mask their condition from others.

It may also be an attempt to resolve the issue without the cost of seeing a medical doctor or as a direct result of personal fears associated with a medical diagnosis.

When is it allowed?

Dr Onyach says there are incidences where one is allowed to self-medicate. For example, diabetic people are on medication every day and are allowed to administer medications requiring self-injection.

"A doctor cannot monitor a diabetic all the time. The best you can do for them is education, including teaching them to inject themselves," Dr Onyach explains.

He further expounds that diabetes is a disease that requires constant and

knowledgeable or has limited knowledge. That is why you need knowledge from a doctor.

Dangers

The risks that are associated with self-medication include:

Inaccurate diagnosis

Dr Onyach says there are incidences where you can take the wrong medicine for the wrong diagnosis.

He further explains that counter medicines have become so common because of limited access to doctors and clinicians. "There is lack of physical ac-

RISK OF ABUSE

Dr Cranmer Key of Font of Hope Medical Centre in Wakiso District notes that if you overuse some drugs such as antibiotics through self-medication, it makes certain bacteria become immune to antibiotics

bad bacteria and start falling sick. "People self-medicate because it seems like the quickest thing to do when they need instant results. This is quicker than an appointment to start therapy. Human beings are responsive to things that are quick and easy. They respond to immediate gratification especially once they

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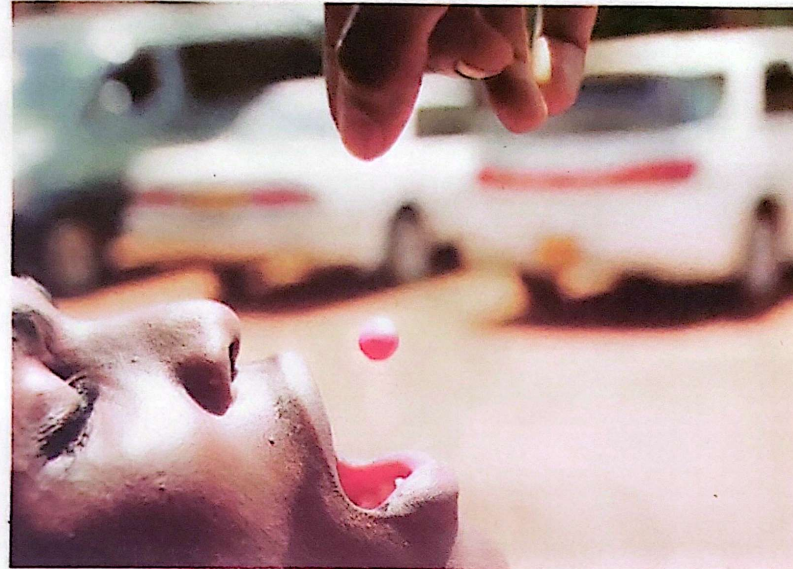
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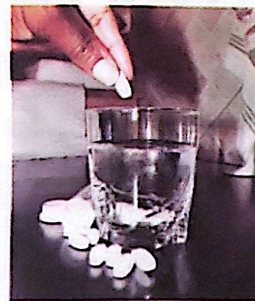
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Before taking any medication, ensure that it has been prescribed by a doctor. PHOTOS BY RACHEL MABALA



though some pass unnoticed."

Side effects

Dr Onyach says: "If a person self-medicates when he or she is not being monitored, they can get serious complications. For example on some occasions, you can administer a drug and go into coma," he says.

Self-medication does not tell the patient about the dosage of the drug, the strength of it, its composition, how the drug needs to be taken, and its side-effects or reactions, if any. A minor health issue which could be resolved easily with the doctor's advice may become a major problem over time.

Therefore, take care of your health and avoid self-medication.

Inaccurate dosage

Dr Cranmer Key, of Font of Hope Medical Centre in Wakiso District, says at the start, these drugs can make a good anesthetic but with continued usage, they become a serious problem.

He says using these drugs can be more complicated because you are using a substance that is controlled inappropriately. This has adverse consequences which include over dosing especially if you use the drugs together with alcohol.

"Self-medication is not really an internal response from your body saying you really need this nutrient but people misuse drugs. This is a form of addictive behaviour which does not solve your problem," Dr Key says.



you may end up treating the wrong diagnosis.

Worrying trend

"Scientists warn of a looming post antibiotic era, where the system is rendered unresponsive making it difficult to...