

## Media Release

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### Know your Medicine Schedules

**As consumers, you're often more involved with pharmaceutical products than you realise, ranging from over-the-counter vitamin supplements to soap, face wash and cream, as well as medicine prescribed by a doctor. Understanding how and why these products are labelled differently means you're more likely to get the most out of your medicine.**

People often wonder why certain medicine is placed in a specific area of a pharmacy or a store; why certain medicines are behind a counter; and why their regular pharmacist suddenly starts asking more questions than usual. The answer, most likely, has to do with the schedule of the medicine.

A medicine schedule is essentially a number given to a pharmaceutical product based on its benefits and its risks. The lower the risk; the lower the number.

#### **Unscheduled medicine**

- Unscheduled medicine can be purchased at a pharmacy, local supermarket, health shop or service station.
- This medicine has a schedule of 0.
- This includes medicine such as Aspirin, small quantities of paracetamol and vitamins.

#### **Over-the-counter (OTC) medicine**

- Over-the-counter (OTC) medicine can be purchased at a pharmacy without a prescription.
- This medicine has a schedule of 0, 1 or 2.
- OTC medicine includes treatments for headaches, coughs and colds, minor skin conditions, etc.
- It is always a good idea to consult the pharmacist (or pharmacy assistant) when selecting an OTC product. Staff are trained to ask important questions in order to give the professional, individual care required.

#### **Prescription medicine**

- Prescription medicine can only be obtained with a script, following a visit to a doctor, dentist or allied health professional such as a homeopath.
- A prescription is 'filled' at a pharmacy, where a pharmacist or pharmacy assistant will explain how the medicine should be taken.
- Prescription medicine has a schedule of 3 and higher.
- Prescription medicine with a high scheduling status, such as schedule 5 or 6, includes antidepressants, sleeping tablets, and strong pain medication. This medicine is usually stored in a separate area in the pharmacy and a register is kept of all sales due to the habit-forming nature or potentially dangerous side effects of the medicine, if used incorrectly.
- Repeat prescriptions for schedule 5 or 6 medicine is either limited or not given at all.

It is advisable to treat all medicine with care, regardless of the schedule. The package insert should always be read as it includes warnings, contra-indications and information about how the product may react with other medication.

The Innovative Pharmaceutical Association South Africa (IPASA) urges consumers to check the expiry date of all medicine; both when it is first purchased and when it has been stored at home for some time, as it may lose effectiveness over time and can even cause damage to organs such as the liver and kidneys, or even the heart.

It is also advisable to make an up-to-date list of medications taken to help health professionals keep track of all medicine and any potential interactions and side effects.

IPASA believes that by following your pharmacist or doctor's instructions carefully,

understanding the scheduling system and why it's there to protect you, you are better able to make an informed decision about managing your health.

**Tips for the safe use of medication:**

- Keep a list of the medications you are on with you – either on your phone or a hard copy.
- Keep all your medicines together in a safe place. Don't keep out-of-date medicines or medicines that you no longer need.
- Don't stop taking medicines you have been prescribed without talking to your GP or another healthcare professional first.
- Medicines come with a patient information leaflet. This has information about how to use them safely and effectively. If you don't get an information leaflet with the medicine, ask for one. Many are also available on the internet.
- If you have questions or concerns about your medicines, you can ask your GP for help. If you don't understand what they tell you, ask them to explain it again more simply.
- Alternatively, you can ask your local pharmacist about your medicines.

**FACT SHEET:**

Schedule of Medicine	Available	Example
0	General shop, e.g. supermarket.	Simple analgesics (e.g. Aspirin, small doses of paracetamol).
1	Over the counter in a pharmacy.	Antibacterial and antifungal skin creams.
2	Over the counter in a pharmacy. Sale record must be kept.	Cough and cold preparations.
3	Prescription only - allowed to repeat for 6 months. Available from the dispensary in the pharmacy.	Medicines for hypertension and diabetes.
4	Prescription only, allowed to repeat for 6 months. Available from the dispensary in the pharmacy.	Anti-infectives (e.g. antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals).
5	Prescription only, repeats stipulated. Available from the dispensary in the pharmacy.	Psycho-active medicines (e.g. sedatives and antidepressants).
6	Prescription only, therapeutic narcotics.	Narcotic painkillers.
7	Controlled substance	Cannabis, methaqualone (also known as mandrax) and heroin.
8	Strictly controlled substances	There are only three of these: amphetamine, dexamphetamine and nabilone.

**Sources:**

Medicines Control Council: Scheduling of Medicines. Found at: [http://www.mccza.com/documents/a56714ff2.36\\_Scheduling\\_of\\_Medicines\\_Jun14\\_v1.pdf](http://www.mccza.com/documents/a56714ff2.36_Scheduling_of_Medicines_Jun14_v1.pdf)

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Section27. Health and democracy: Developing, registering and using medicines. Found at: <http://section27.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Chapter13.pdf>