

Prescription Drug Checklist

A few tips to world travelers on avoiding dangerous use of prescription drugs:

Remember the drugs to which you are—or think you may be—allergic. Before you start your travels, consult your own physician on which drugs—especially those for the control of pain and diarrhea—are both effective and relatively safe. Note that many pain-killers and antidiarrhea agents popularly prescribed and used in other countries are considered ineffective or unsafe and accordingly are not permitted on the United States market.

Insist that a physician prescribing a drug for you abroad must tell you the possible serious side-effects, and which warning symptoms to keep in mind. Use caution in taking a prescription drug recommended by anyone other than a physician who prescribes it specifically for you.

If you are on long-term medication, take along an adequate supply. If you may need to replenish your supply while you are out of the country, have your own physician or pharmacist give you the generic (or internationally accepted) name of the drug. In many foreign countries, the product may be marketed under a different brand name.

If a physician plans to prescribe a drug for you, tell him what other drugs—prescription or over-the-counter—you are also taking. Drug-drug interactions can be lethal.

If anyone—physician, pharmacist or fellow tourist—tells you that a particular drug is perfectly safe, don't believe him. With few if any exceptions, any drug that is effective can also be harmful and, in some conditions, can be fatal.

—Milton Silverman