

# Protecting Yourself From Counterfeit Drugs



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You have lots of choices for buying prescription drugs these days. Among them are online pharmacies. Many online pharmacies offer greater convenience and lower prices than the corner drugstore, but if you don't know for sure if the seller you're dealing with is legitimate, you may be at risk of receiving products that are contaminated, counterfeit, or not approved by the FDA—or you may pay and receive nothing at all.

Counterfeit drugs can be dangerous to your health. Counterfeit medicine may be ineffective or cause serious side effects such as an allergic reaction. Drugs that are legitimate but not correctly prescribed (for example, those prescribed by an online doctor who has not examined you) can also be harmful or ineffective.

Here are some tips for buying prescription drugs online:

1. **Never purchase prescription drugs without your doctor's prescription.** Some online pharmacies will sell you drugs without one or only require that you fill out a short questionnaire. Taking drugs without the advice of a healthcare professional may put you at risk for drug interactions and other serious consequences.
2. **Be familiar with the medications you take,** including the color, size, shape, taste, and side effects. If you receive a counterfeit medication, you may be able to identify it more easily.
3. **Make sure the package or container** the medication comes in has not been altered or the label changed.
4. **Only buy prescription medications from a licensed pharmacy,** online or offline. To determine if a website is a licensed pharmacy in good standing, check with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy ([www.nabp.net](http://www.nabp.net), 847-698-6227).
5. **Do not purchase drugs from a foreign website.** It may be illegal to import the drugs bought from these sites.
6. **Use common sense.** If the website advertises a drug as a "miracle cure" for a disease or pushes a drug that guarantees weight loss, the claims are probably false.
7. **Report any website for a pharmacy** that you think is illegal or any drug you purchased that you suspect is counterfeit. If you bought the drug by mail, telephone, or in person, contact the FDA's Medwatch program at 800-332-1088 or at [www.fda.gov/medwatch/](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/). To report a counterfeit drug that you bought on the Internet, visit [www.fda.gov/oc/buyonline/buyonlineform.htm](http://www.fda.gov/oc/buyonline/buyonlineform.htm) or call the Medwatch number.



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