

Cabinet reshuffle

A quick look at the Which? family's medicine chest revealed some simple ways to save

We asked the four Which? family households (see *Which?*, January 2008) to tell us what's in their medicine cabinet. Darren Jones told us his family usually buys brand-name medicines because 'you always know what you're getting'.

We asked an experienced pharmacist to suggest areas where money could be saved. She said: 'There are many own-brand and generic equivalents that do essentially the same thing and cost less.'

'Overall, the medicines that the family have provide reasonable value for money, but some savings could be made.'

Painkillers

Three of the four households had bought Nurofen when generic or own-brand ibuprofen would have cost less.

'Branded painkillers sometimes contain extra ingredients, but these have few benefits,' our expert said. 'Some contain things like caffeine, but you could get the same amount from a cup of coffee. However, it may be worth considering a branded product if you want an easy-to-swallow version.'

SAVINGS Tesco sells own-brand 200mg ibuprofen at 33p for 16 tablets and Nurofen (also 200mg ibuprofen) at £1.57 for 16 tablets – a difference of £1.24.

Coughs and colds

The families also tend to buy branded cough and cold remedies, such as Lemsip, rather than cheaper generic or own-brand equivalents.

SAVINGS Our expert said that Numark Max Strength Cold & Flu Relief (£2.79) and Boots Max Strength Direct Dose Cold & Flu Relief (£3.29) have the same active ingredients as Lemsip Max Cold & Flu (£3.99) – a saving of up to £1.20.

Sunscreens

The families use a mixture of branded and own-brand sunscreens. Our latest test of SPF15 sunscreens found three for £3 or less that provided the same level of protection as products that cost up to seven times as much (see www.which.co.uk/sunscreens).

SAVINGS If you're heading to sunny climes this autumn, consider buying the Best Buy Wilkinson Sun Protection System Lotion instead of the Best Buy L'Oréal Solar Expertise. It would give you just as much protection and save you £12.30.

Prescriptions

If you pay prescription charges, ask your pharmacist whether you can buy the medicine cheaper without a prescription.

SAVINGS Dentists often prescribe Corsodyl for people recovering from oral surgery, but it can be bought over the counter for £3.59 – saving £3.51 on the standard prescription charge of £7.10.



MEDICINE CABINET BASICS

Our expert pharmacist lists the items every home should have

Core items

Paracetamol or ibuprofen (adults and children) or **aspirin** (age 16 and over)

Indigestion remedy

Diarrhoea remedy (eg loperamide) and **rehydration sachets**

Sunscreen (SPF15 or higher)

Antihistamine tablets or liquid for allergies

Antiseptic cream

Thermometer

General first-aid items (plasters of various sizes, tweezers, eye-wash solution)

Items for intermittent problems

Cold-sore remedy (eg Zovirax, Numark Acyclovir)

Hayfever remedy (eg loratadine)

Spray or rub for muscular problems

Holiday items

Insect repellent (the NHS recommends formulations containing 50% DEET — Diethyl-meta-toluamide)

Insect-bite cream (eg hydrocortisone 1%)

HOW YOU CAN DO IT

Bitesize tips for saving money on medication and keeping your family safe

■ **Good to talk** Get to know your pharmacist. They can advise on value medicines.

■ **Think ahead** Consider prepayment certificates (PPCs) if you need prescriptions regularly. In England the charge for a single prescription item is £7.10, but a three-month PPC will cost you £27.85, and a 12-month PPC £102.50. Get more information from www.ppa.org.uk/ppa/ppc_intro.htm.

Procedures vary in N Ireland and Scotland (prescriptions are free in Wales).

■ **Safety first** Store medicines safely and out of reach of children, have a



regular clear out, and take out-of-date items to a pharmacy for disposal. The Consumer Health Information Centre has more information (www.chic.org.uk).

■ **Quick referral** Keep the patient information leaflet (PIL) with your medicine, so you can refer to it in future. If you can't find it, contact a pharmacist. You can also view PILs for many medicines at www.medicines.org.uk.