

EXPERT ADVICE

Ask the Pharmacist

The pharmacist is the best source of information to help you get the most out of your medicine. Here to answer your questions on medicine is HK Wong, a pharmacist with 10 years of experience. He is currently managing an independent retail pharmacy in Klang.



ANTIHISTAMINES FOR ALLERGY RELIEF

Q: What are antihistamines? How do they help allergy sufferers?

A: Antihistamines are used to treat allergic symptoms. These drugs block the action of histamines, a substance released in the body during an allergic reaction. Histamine can cause allergic symptoms such as itching, swelling, reddening, sneezing, running nose and watery eyes. Also, in some persons, histamine can close up the bronchial tubes (air passages of the lungs) and make breathing difficult.

Antihistamine drugs are available in the form of tablets, syrup and injections. Antihistamines are controlled medicine, which can only be prescribed by doctors or dispensed by pharmacists. They are not available over-the-counter in Malaysia. Older types of antihistamines tend to cause drowsiness, while newer types of antihistamines have less sedative effects. It is important not to drive, operate machinery, or engage in activities that require you to stay alert when you take this medication.

If you are taking other medication, do inform your doctor before taking antihistamines. Certain medications such as antidepressants, sedatives, and tranquilizers should not be used together with antihistamines.

HELP FOR CRACKED HEELS

Q: What are the causes of cracked heels? What are the treatments available for this condition? Are there ways to avoid cracked heels?

A: Cracked heels, which are also referred to as fissures, are a common problem. Besides peeling and cracked skin, it is accompanied by hard growth of skin usually on the outer edge of the heel. It can become painful, especially when the cracking starts to bleed.

The main cause of cracked heels is usually dry skin. Other factors that contribute to cracked heels are wearing of open backed shoes, excessive use of hot water, prolonged standing, eczema and psoriasis.

There are ointments and creams available to keep the affected area moist. Here are more ways to help you reduce cracked heels:

- Use pumice stone to file the hard, dry skin. Do this before applying ointment or cream.
- After applying ointment at night, wear socks to keep the area well-moist.
- Always wear comfortable shoes. Avoid open backed and thin soled shoes.

Do see a doctor if there is bleeding, as it can lead to infection. This is particularly so for those with diabetes and lowered immune system due to age or illness.

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