

Introduction

Some of civilisation's greatest steps forward have been provided by the revolutionary advances in modern therapeutic drugs, which have had life saving - or life prolonging - results for untold millions of people. The ever-expanding worlds of science and technology, together with humanity's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and constant spirit of inquiry, have spawned developments in pharmacology - the study of the action, effects and usage of drugs - which have transformed the treatment and prevention of many diseases that previously defied medical science.

At a more prosaic level, efficient manufacturing processes and extensive distribution networks have combined to provide most people with ready access to drugs. And the development of regulatory frameworks has ensured that drugs which enter the market are backed by solid evidence of their safety and effectiveness.

In Australia, consumers can rest assured that the pharmaceutical drugs they obtain have been evaluated on the basis of substantial research and extensive clinical trials before they are approved for use.

However, you should never take medication choices lightly. Even the most widely available pharmaceutical drugs can be harmful if misused, either intentionally or accidentally. It's always best to get advice from health professionals before taking any drug for any length of time.

And remember: drugs are not necessarily the answer, or the only cure, for many disorders. Lifestyle choices can be crucial for your well-being. A healthy diet, regular exercise, not smoking, drinking in moderation, watching your weight and keeping your stress levels low are the foundations of good health.

WHAT'S IN THE BOOK?

Much of the information about drugs is too technical for untrained people to fully understand. Nevertheless, consumers repeatedly express a desire to know more about the medications they are using.

What Am I Taking? is designed to give you basic facts about drugs which have been prescribed or recommended for you. It is **NOT** designed to help you decide

which drugs you should be taking. The book contains "snapshots" of 100 of Australia's most commonly used pharmaceutical drugs, written in easy to understand language.

The drug profiles are brief and include information that users should know about each drug: what it is commonly used for, how it works, potential side effects and interactions with other drugs, and how it should be used.

They have been compiled by summarising evidence from a variety of sources, including reputable and recognised independent references, and consumer information provided by drug manufacturers.

The list of 100 drugs was developed by referring to prescribing statistics available from Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) when it was prepared, as well as including some common non-prescription drugs and a few relatively new drugs which were already being widely prescribed. The profiled drugs accounted for around 75% of prescriptions written annually for the 900-odd drugs approved under the PBS.

The book is divided into the following sections:

- **Warnings, Precautions and More** contains important general information and advice about pharmaceutical drugs and their safe use
- **Treatment Classes** contains information about conditions that the drugs in the profiles are commonly used to treat or prevent
- **Drug Profiles - Important Information** explains the content of the individual drug profiles and should be read in conjunction with each profile

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- **Drug Profiles** are the 100 drugs specifically covered in the book, listed alphabetically
- **Index** lists brand names for products containing the profiled drugs.

WHAT'S NOT IN THE BOOK?

The information about the profiled drugs is, of necessity, not completely comprehensive; if everything known about each drug was included, the book would be many times larger than it is.

Accepted key facts about the drugs are included but it must also be emphasised that, just as every individual is different, so are their potential responses and reactions to individual drugs. It is very important to follow advice provided by doctors and pharmacists. Consequently, the book provides no advice or recommendations about which drugs might be best for you; that is the job of professionals who are trained to assess your condition and decide which drug is most suitable.

WHAT IF MY DRUG IS NOT INCLUDED?

While the 100 drugs profiled in this book constitute a large proportion of the range of medications used in Australia there are, of course, hundreds of other prescription and non-prescription drugs - some used by substantial numbers of people and others with more specialised or limited uses - that are not covered. Many of these other drugs are accepted alternatives to, or belong in the same classes as, drugs that are profiled in the book.

The inclusion of a drug in the profiles does not imply that it is the recommended or preferred treatment for any condition and, if a drug is not included, this also does not imply it is any less effective or suitable than others which are profiled.

While some medicines are similar in their actions or effects, there can also be subtle differences between drugs that are otherwise alike. Health professionals take many factors into account (e.g. age, other health problems, weight and physical condition, lifestyle factors, family history, other drugs, the condition being targeted)

when they prescribe or recommend medications. It is not unusual for drugs or doses to be changed over time if they are not achieving the desired results, are causing problems or if new medical conditions arise. If a drug is less commonly used than other similar drugs, this does not mean it is the wrong choice for you.

If your medication is not included, or if you want to find out more about any of the profiled drugs, the *Warnings, Precautions and More* section contains general information about using medications and advice about other reliable sources of information.

TERMINOLOGY

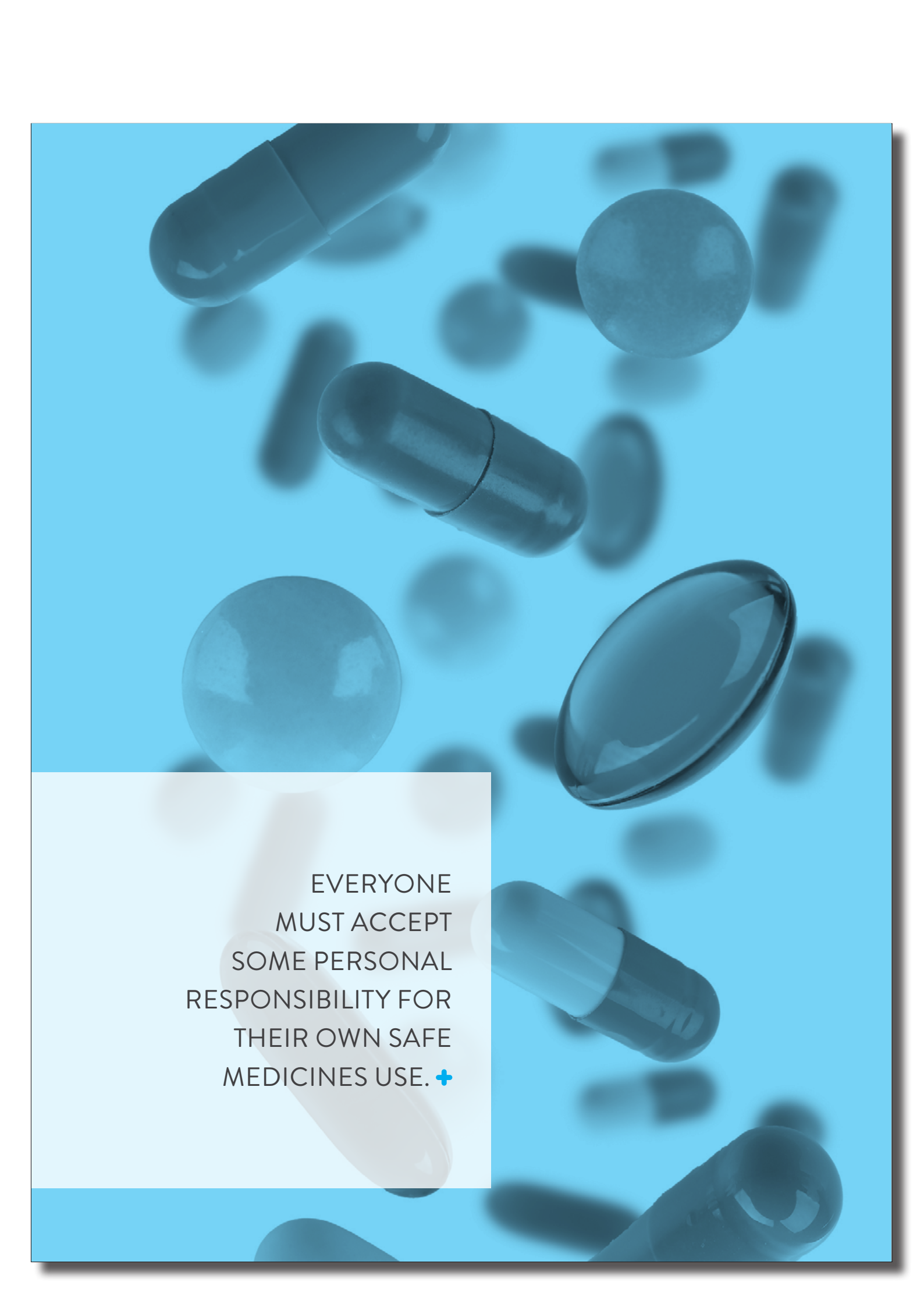
This book is subtitled "The Australian consumer's guide to pharmaceutical drugs." Other terms could have been used in place of "pharmaceutical drugs", but may have caused confusion about the contents.

"Medicines" and "medications" are also commonly used when referring to herbal and natural preparations, which are not covered in the book. Some consumers understand "medicines" to refer specifically to liquids (e.g. cough syrup). However it should be noted that, among health professionals, "medicines" is the accepted term for all types of formulations such as tablets, capsules, liquids, inhalers, patches, sprays, creams, injections, etc.

Using the word "drugs" on its own on the book's front cover may have incorrectly suggested illegal substances. "Prescription drugs" was another option but the drugs profiled in the book include some that are available without a prescription.

In the end it was decided to use "pharmaceutical drugs" in the title, as the least ambiguous description of the book's contents. Throughout the text, the word "drug" is generally used when referring to the active ingredient (see *Drug Name*, page 32). To avoid repetition the alternatives "medicine" or "medication" are occasionally used, especially when referring to products rather than active ingredients. However in the context in which they are used in the book, all three words essentially have the same meaning.



The background of the entire image is a light blue surface with numerous pills and capsules scattered across it. Some are in sharp focus, while others are blurred in the background. The pills vary in shape, including round tablets and elongated capsules, some with visible markings.

EVERYONE
MUST ACCEPT
SOME PERSONAL
RESPONSIBILITY FOR
THEIR OWN SAFE
MEDICINES USE. +