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BNF changes warning labels thanks to Luto research

Following a review by the British National Formulary (BNF), warning labels on medicines have been simplified to make the wording clearer for patients. A revised set of cautionary and advisory labels has now been published in the new edition of the BNF following a programme of user testing and research into compliance by Mawdsley's owned, Leeds University spin out, [Luto Research](#).

The BNF wanted to improve the original wording, which has been in use since 1985, and sought the advice of Professor Theo Raynor, a director of Luto Research and Professor of Pharmacy Practice at Leeds University. Luto undertook readability testing of the 32 cautionary and advisory labels for dispensed medicines from appendix 9 of the BNF, with the aim to implement terminology that is better understood by patients.

Professor Theo Raynor says: "Most medicines do contain leaflets which provide detailed information for patients. However, the leaflet may get lost which means that the label on the medicine plays a very important part in guiding people's behaviour. It is vital therefore that wordings on labels are simple and straightforward. In taking more care about the wording of detailed instructions we can help improve the safety of medicines. With two million prescriptions being issued every day, a small percentage improvement through labels being more understandable could make a significant impact."

"For instance, 'avoid alcoholic drinks' is a good example. Our user tests revealed that the word 'avoid' can cause confusion and that some people think it only means they should limit their alcohol intake. This phrase will now be replaced by the instruction: 'Do not drink alcohol while taking this medicine,' which is far clearer. It has never been easier to change labels on medicines given current computerised systems, and we therefore hope that the large pharmacy chains and independent pharmacies will be keen to adopt the recommendations which appear in the new edition of the BNF."

The changes are already appearing on community pharmacy systems; Mawdsleys' pharmacy software arm, **Positive Solutions**, updated all their customers within days of the announcement.

Previous wording	New wording
Avoid alcoholic drink	Do not drink alcohol while taking this medicine
Do not take indigestion remedies at the same time of day as this medicine	Do not take indigestion remedies two hours before or after you take this medicine
Do not stop taking this medicine except on your doctor's advice	Warning: Do not stop taking this medicine unless your doctor tells you to stop
Warning: May cause drowsiness	Warning: This medicine may make you sleepy

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