[Leaflet explaining how the Department of Health's herbal medicine licensing system safeguards the public].

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FOR SAFETY AND QUALITY IN

HERBAL MEDICINE





LOOK FOR THE LICENCE!

Potters have produced this leaflet to explain how the Department of Health's herbal medicine licensing system safeguards the public. Recent changes in the law, as the UK becomes part of the full European Market, have meant changes to products and their labelling which some customers have found confusing. We hope this leaflet will be helpful.



NSWER

HERBAL MEDICINES GO BACK CENTURIES - SO WHEN DID ALL THIS 'LICENSING' BUSINESS START?

Yes, the curative powers of herbs have been recognised throughout history, and less than sixty years ago 'medicine' and 'herbal medicine' meant one and the same thing. But with the development of new and powerful drugs, new tight requirements were needed to protect the public, and these laws were also applied to the herbal products which had been tried and tested by many generations.

The Medicines Act (1968) set out the new requirements, which many smaller businesses found difficult to meet. Some went out of business but those that remained geared themselves to meet the new technological and scientific challenges, manufacturing products that presented tried and tested herbal ingredients in ways which satisfied the new laws. Herbal medicines which met the Act's requirements were granted Product Licences of Right, indicated by the initials 'PLR' before the licence numbers on their labels.

About half of the 2000 licensed herbal medicines available in the UK carry Licences of Right. This means that the safety and effectiveness of the product has been established over many years and that it also meets the various criteria of the Department of Health.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THESE NEW LICENCES I'VE BEEN READING ABOUT?

With the single European market coming in 1992, it was decided to introduce a very strict licensing system for herbal medicines to apply throughout the European community. Every product carrying a Licence of Right is under review by a special committee and has to meet new tight guidelines about ingredients, labelling, claims, instructions and so on. If a product already meets these requirements, or if it is modified to do so, then it is granted a full Product Licence (shown as PL before the number) - if not, it must be withdrawn.

Once a Product Licence is issued, the manufacturer cannot change or modify the product in any way without reference to the licensing authorities.

The review process is still under way, but eventually the 1000 or so products still carrying Licences of Right will receive a Full Licence or will be discontinued.

BUT DOES THIS MEAN THE HERBAL MEDICINES I HAVE USED FOR YEARS WERE UNSAFE?

No, not at all. Generally formulations have been left unchanged or altered very slightly. Most of the requirements of the Licensing Review Committee affect the wording on the label and are designed to provide the consumer with more information about the medicine and how it should be taken.

Potter's, for example, now sell 50 Fully Licensed products; all these have been sold for many years under the Licence of Right system and have required very few changes of a minor nature in order to qualify for a Full Licence. We are confident that our remaining Licence of Right products will come through the review process with equal success.

WILL EVERY HERBAL PRODUCT I BUY HAVE TO CARRY A PRODUCT LICENCE?

No, because the rules only apply to herbal medicines some items which people refer to as 'herbal remedies' are actually classed by the Department of Health as food or dietary supplements. These include such products as herbal teas and ginseng, and feverfew products. Because they are not classed as medicines, they do not require a Product Licence although they must of course meet the legal requirements for the quality, content and manufacture of food products.

I'VE READ A LOT IN THE PRESS LATELY ABOUT 'COWBOY' PRODUCTS. WHAT DOES THIS EXPRESSION MEAN?

Unfortunately some manufacturers are following the letter rather than the spirit of the law by marketing unlicensed products in a way that implies they have medicinal properties. These products do not need to meet the Department of Health's strict herbal medicine licensing rules and so people using them are not protected in the same way. If you think you need a herbal remedy, look for the PL or PLR licence number on the pack or container.

YOU'VE MENTIONED PRODUCT LICENCES (PL) AND LICENCES OF RIGHT (PLR) - WHAT DOES THE 'ML' NUMBER ON THE LABEL MEAN?

The 'ML' stands for Manufacturer's Licence and is the customer's guarantee that the product is made

by a reputable producer under conditions which meet the exacting standards of the Department of Health. Only Licensed Manufacturers can make Licensed Medicines.

DO OTHER TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES HAVE TO BE LICENSED?

Homeopathic, biochemic and anthroposophic remedies also carry Licences of Right which will be reviewed by the Department of Health Committee, following on from the herbal medicines review.

I NOTICE THAT THE LABEL ON ONE OF YOUR PRODUCTS HAS CHANGED - IT NO LONGER RECOMMENDS ITS USE TO TREAT MY PARTICULAR COMPLAINT. DOES THAT MEAN I SHOULD STOP TAKING THE TABLETS?

This is one of the effects of the licensing review; we are now very restricted about what we can claim for our products, even if they have been used successfully by many people to treat a particular condition for many years! If you have found a product helpful in the past, you can rest assured that it will continue to be just as effective, and as safe.

Do read the directions carefully, however. There are some people (pregnant women, or young children, for example) for whom the product may not be suitable, and you are advised to consult your doctor if you are taking other medication with the product.

I WOULD LIKE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HERBAL REMEDIES? WHERE SHOULD I GO FOR ADVICE?

Interest in the gentler, more natural healing properties of herbal medicines is growing all the time. At Potter's we produce a number of leaflets and booklets on common ailments and conditions and the most useful herbal products to use in their treatment. To receive more information please send your name and address, to Dept IPCL, Potter's (Herbal Supplies) Ltd., Leyland Mill Lane, Wigan, Lancs WN1 2SB.

The national organisation that exists to promote wider understanding of natural medicines of all kinds is the Natural Medicines Society. Information about membership can be obtained from the Society at Edith Lewis House, Back Lane, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 8EJ.



ISSUED BY

Potter's

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