



LAUREA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

# Brochure on over-the-counter medication and pharmaceutical policies in Finland



Levänen Sari  
Gurung Tsering

Laurea University of Applied sciences  
Laurea Otaniemi

Brochure on over-the-counter medication and pharmaceutical  
policies in Finland

Sari Levänen  
Tsering Gurung  
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Laurea University of Applied sciences  
 Laurea Otaniemi  
 Degree Programme of Nursing

Abstract

Sari Levänen, Tsering Gurung

**Brochure on over-the-counter medication and pharmaceutical policies in Finland**

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During the last decades Finland has internationalised significantly. Most foreigners come to Finland from Sweden, Estonia and Russia. However English is widely spoken, by mother tongue it is the thirdly most spoken foreign language in Finland. Especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area the amount of foreigner has increased.

Medications which can be bought from pharmacies without prescription are so called over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. The variation and availability of OTC medication vary from country to country. Not even in the EU there are no harmonised pharmaceutical policies. In Finland pharmaceutical are strictly controlled by Finnish Medicine Agency (FIMEA). Nowadays written and oral patient guidance plays a significant role as people are more interested in their health. Because of the internationalization it would be beneficial to have more written material in English as well.

The purpose of this study was to increase foreigner's knowledge on Finnish policies concerning over-the-counter medication and pharmacies. The project was undertaken in collaboration with Tapiola Pharmacy.

This thesis was implemented as a practice-based thesis. The material was collected by using a literature review. The brochure was produced utilizing and following the quality criteria for health material. Ethical considerations were highly undertaken while writing the thesis and making the brochure. The purpose was to produce compact but comprehensive brochure. A pharmacist as an expert directed and evaluated the brochure during the process.

Keywords: Over-the-counter medication, pharmaceutical policies, brochure, foreigner

Laurea Ammattikorkeakoulu  
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Tiivistelmä

Sari Levänen, Tsering Gurung

### Esite itsehoitolääkkeistä ja farmaseuttisesta politiikasta Suomessa

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Viime vuosikymmeninä Suomi on kansainvälistynyt merkittävästi. Suurimmat ulkomaalaisryhmät tulevat Venäjältä, Ruotsista sekä Virosta. Kuitenkin Englanti on hyvin yleisesti käytetty sillä se on kolmanneksi yleisin äidinkieli vieraista kielistä. Erityisesti pääkaupunkiseudulla ulkomaalaisten määrä on lisääntynyt.

Lääkkeitä, joita voi ostaa apteekista ilman lääkärin määräystä kutsutaan itsehoitolääkkeiksi. Itsehoitolääkkeiden vaihtelevuus ja saatavuus vaihtelee eri maiden välillä. Edes EU:ssa ei ole yhtenäistä farmakologista politiikka. Suomessa lääkeala on tarkasti kontrolloitu Lääkealan turvallisuus- ja kehittämiskeskuksen (FIMEA) toimesta. Nykypäivänä suullinen ja kirjallinen potilasohjaus on hyvin tärkeää sillä ihmiset ovat entistä kiinnostuneempia terveydestään. Kansainvälistymisen seurauksena olisi hyödyllistä että englanninkielistä materiaalia olisi enemmän tarjolla.

Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli lisätä ulkomaalaisten tietoa Suomen käytännöistä itsehoitolääkkeiden sekä farmaseuttisen politiikan suhteen. Opinnäytetyö toteutettiin Tapiola Apteekki - projektissa.

Opinnäytetyö toteutettiin toiminnallisena opinnäytetyönä. Materiaali kerättiin kirjallisuuskatsauksen pohjalta. Esite tuotettiin hyödyntämällä ja seuraamalla terveystieteiden laatukriteerejä. Eettiset näkökohdat huomioitiin tarkasti opinnäytetyötä kirjoittaessa ja esitettä tehdessä. Esitteen oli tarkoitus olla tiivis mutta kattava. Proviisori Tapiolan apteekista asiantuntijan roolissa ohjasi ja arvioi esitettä prosessin aikana.

Asiasanat: Itsehoitolääkkeet, farmaseuttinen politiikka, esite, ulkomaalainen

## 1 Introduction

The number of foreigners in Finland has increased rapidly during the last decades and gradually Finland is changing to multicultural society. At the end of the year 2001 the number of foreigners in Finland was 98 557, and by the end of the year 2009 155 660. This means almost increase of 58 % in eight years. Because Finnish and Swedish are official languages in Finland it is not self-evident that all the information is available in English or other languages. In order to benefit of Finnish social welfare and healthcare system, foreigners need information of how it works. Finnish constitutional law forbids discrimination. For permanent residents in Finland the rights to get health and medical care services and information or services on their mother tongue are equal to Finnish citizens. (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2009 and Laki potilaan asemasta ja oikeuksista, 1992)

All the laws and regulation concerning medicines are usually regulated and controlled by the government of the particular country. Even in the EU the availability of medication including both OTC and prescription medications vary a lot due to the lack of harmonized pharmaceutical policies. There are remarkable variations between countries. For example in Spain some antibiotics, erectile dysfunction, sleeping and cardiovascular medications can be bought over the counter where as in Finland all these medications need doctor's prescription. (Väänänen M. 2008) Because of these variations among the countries it is important to offer information related to health issues also in other languages, particularly in English as it is widely understood by foreigners in Finland.

In addition to the oral guidance the customers get in pharmacies it is important to get written guidance as well. Both of them support each other. Giving guidance is also part of nurses' daily work. Writers as nursing students wanted to offer written health material to the pharmacist who meet English speaking customers. The customers can use the brochure for example as a checklist later. The brochure will also help pharmacists who do not speak fluent English.

This thesis is accomplished as a practice-based thesis. Vilkkä H. & Airaksinen T. (2003) states that practice-based thesis aims to instruct and guide practice or arrange and rationalise actions. There are several methods of implementation such as book, brochure, CD, folder or homepage. The outcome of this thesis is brochure which guides and instructs Tapiola Pharmacy which is the working life partner in this project.

The aim of this study was to produce English brochure on over the counter medicines and pharmaceutical policies in Finland. The purpose was to increase foreigners' knowledge on Finnish practices. The idea particularly to focus on over the counter medicines came from working life partner, Tapiola pharmacy.

## 2 Tapiola Pharmacy -project and the purpose of the study

### 2.1 Tapiola Pharmacy -project

The topic of this thesis is over the counter (OTC) medicines in Finnish pharmacies. During the thesis process literature review was done on over-the-counter medications, Finnish pharmaceutical policies, brochure and foreigners in Finland. The intention was to produce a brochure which will be used by the workers in Tapiola pharmacy when they meet English speaking customers. The brochure will be available in Tapiola pharmacy. The brochure aims to be compact but comprehensive.

This thesis belongs to a project 'Promoting the self-care of the customers using medication in collaboration between pharmacy and health care section'. Our working life partner has been Tapiola pharmacy. The aim of the project is health promotion of the customers who use medication and developing the cooperation with pharmacy and health care section.

### 2.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose is to increase foreigner's knowledge on Finnish policies concerning over the counter medication and pharmacies. The brochure also contains instructions how to use OTC medication safely. The target group is defined 'English speaking foreigners' because aim is to produce a written health material for foreigners. Although English is widely spoken language in Finland there is limited amount of written health material available in English.

## 3 Literature review as a methodology

Literature review means an organized, critical collection and evaluation of important published literature that supports a study. In writing the literature review, the purpose is to convey to the readers what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. As a piece of writing, the literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g., your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing or your argumentative thesis). (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006). Literature review was applied in this study to recognize what is already known in this area of study. The contents, strategies, concepts used concerning the similar area of study and to identify the controversies in this area of study.

### 3.1 Literature research

A literature search is a detailed and organized; step by step search for all the material available on a topic. The electronic article search was conducted during autumn of 2010. SAGE, OVID, Science direct and EBSCO databases were used to carry out the electronic search. Most of the articles were limited to the free full text. Some articles abstracts were accessible while some were not. Therefore, other electronic search like e-journal and Google scholar were also carried out to extract more literature which related to this study. The main key words used for literature search in SAGE, OVID, EBSCO and Science direct were over-the-counter medications, Finnish pharmaceutical policies, brochure and foreigners in Finland. Using one keyword produced either a lot of irrelevant results or very less results; therefore the keywords were combined to find more relevant potential results. The keywords were combined as follows: overthecount\* or Finpharma\*, overthecount\* or brochure\* AND foreign\* or pharma\*. Unfortunately the results obtained through combining keywords were limited.

Manual literature research such as book and brochure both in Finnish and English that were related to over-the-counter brochure, Finnish pharmaceutical policies and foreigners in Finland were carried out during the process of literature research. Since, our study revolved around Finnish pharmaceuticals policies, Foreigners in Finland and over-the-counter medications, official internet pages like apteekkariliito.fi, maahanmuutovirasto.fi, tilastokeskus.fi, Finnish medicines Agency fimea.fi were the most potential source of literature research for this study. Tapiola pharmacy also provided the writers a lot of brochure in Finnish which was also very significant source of literature for this study.

### 3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The first step for inclusion and exclusion criteria was the limitation of literature research results related to the topic. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were essential to ensure the quality of the results. Inclusion and exclusion criteria used for the studies were set as follows:



Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<p>Literature relevant to the subject matter of the study.</p> <p>Studies published in English and Finnish.</p> <p>Studies and brochure published after the year 2000. Exceptions made for two studies which were published before the year 2000 as they were significant source of evidence for this study.</p> <p>Studies based on empirical evidence.</p> <p>Articles available in abstract as well as full texts.</p> <p>Official Finnish internet pages.</p>	<p>Literature irrelevant to the subject matter of the study.</p> <p>Studies published in other languages.</p> <p>Studies and brochure published before the year 2000.</p> <p>Studies not based empirical evidence.</p> <p>Articles without abstracts and full text.</p>

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

### 3.3 Data analysis

All the data which did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. Both the writers were involved in selecting the data. After the relevant articles, brochure and journals were selected, the writers started to begin with the analyzing process.

The analyzing process began with reading all the selected literature independently for several times. Since, the main aim of this study was to produce an English brochure on over-the-counter medications and pharmaceutical policies in Finland, both writers repeated to the read the articles, journals and brochure which enclosed aspects of pharmaceutical policies in Finland and other countries, over-the-counter medications, foreigners and foreigners in Finland, pharmacies in general and pharmacies in Finland. Official Finnish internet pages were searched throughout the study process to find the relevant information for this study. Not all the Finnish official electronic pages had English version so few translation were also made. After a long process of analysis of data, the final brochure was created by the writers. (See appendix1)

## 4 Foreigners and health care

#### 4.1 Foreigners in Finland

Both Tilastokeskus (2009) and Maahanmuuttovirasto (2009) have several different statistics on foreigners in Finland. Research has shown that the number of foreigners in Finland has increased rapidly during the last decades and gradually Finland is changing to multicultural society. In the end of the year 1991 there were 37 600 foreigners in Finland; by the end of the year 2009 the number was 155 700. So during the last to two decades the number of foreigner has increased more than three times. Even though the number of foreigners has multiply, internationally the percentage in Finland is low. The main reasons foreigners come to Finland include; work, studies, family and asylum seekers. By nationalities the biggest groups come to Finland's from the neighbor countries; Russia, Estonia and Sweden. Other large groups by nationalities are Somalia, China, Thailand, Iraq, Turkey, Germany and Great Britain. Almost 12 000 foreigners have English as a mother tongue which makes it the thirdly most spoken foreign language in Finland. Even though English is not the most spoken foreign language in Finland, it is a universal language which is used as a foreign medium of communication in almost every country. (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2009 & Tilastokeskus, 2009)

According to statistics by Tilastokeskus (2010) in Espoo the number of foreigners in the end of the year 2009 was 15 300, respectively in Helsinki the number was 42 000. So in Espoo the foreign population forms 6 % of the population. Tapiola pharmacy is located in Espoo near to Helsinki border. This proofs that there are foreign people living near to Tapiola Pharmacy which can be seen as a possible customers for the pharmacy.

People coming from abroad has different wishes, needs, traditions and attitudes concerning health and wellbeing which creates challenges also for the health care professionals in Finland. In multicultural health care the professionals needs to be sensitive, un-biased, understanding and have good interaction skills. It is stated in the Finnish Constitutional law that adequate social, health and medical services are guaranteed for everyone. Also that everyone is equal before the law regardless of language and origin among other things. In order that a person coming from a foreign country can benefit of and gravitate to health care services information in understandable language is needed. Information about health care services can be increased for example with written handouts and guidebooks. (Valtakunnallinen terveydenhuollon eettinen neuvottelukunta 2004)

Ulkomaalaiset Suomessa 1991–2009 | Tilanne vuosittain 31.12.

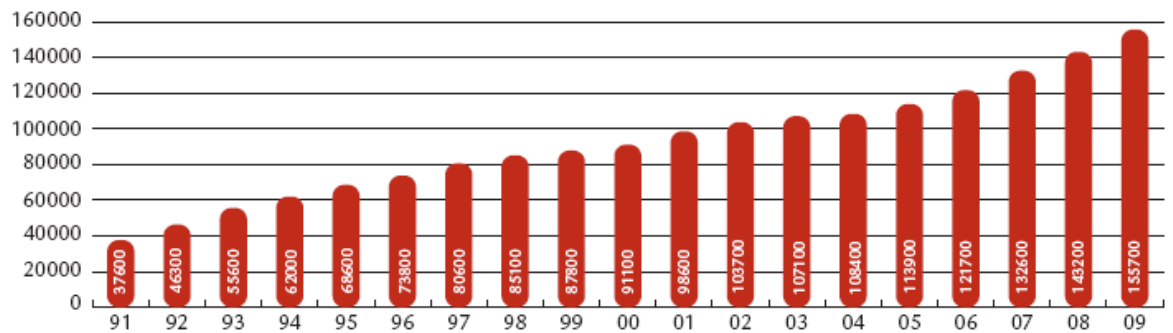


Figure 1. Foreigners in Finland 1991-2009. Tilastokeskus 2010

#### 4.2 Foreigners' medical fee policies in Finland

There are certain laws and regulations related to health care services that concern the foreigners living in Finland permanently and temporary. The duration and status as well as the country of origin affect the rights that non Finnish residents have. (Kansaneläkelaitos, 2008)

Finnish constitutional law forbids discrimination and guarantees equal health services for all the permanent residents of Finland regardless of their country of origin. One of important laws related to health care is the *act on the status and rights of the patient*. “Every person who stays permanently in Finland is without discrimination entitled to health and medical care required by his state of health within the limits of those resources which are available to health care at the time in question. Concerning the right to treatment of those persons who stay in Finland temporarily, what has specially been provided or what has been agreed upon between states reciprocally remains in force.” And “The mother tongue, individual needs and culture of the patient have to be taken into account as far as possible in his/her care and other treatment.” (Laki potilaan asemasta ja oikeuksista, 1992)

The Finnish Social Insurance Institution is important source related to guidelines concerning the costs of health care for foreigners in Finland. There are guidelines for people coming both temporarily and permanently to Finland. For temporary residents the country of origin affect significantly to the costs and possibilities of health care. For example travellers for EU/EEA country or Switzerland are entitled to necessary medical treatment and for reimbursements for treatment costs provided by public health care providers. The charged fees are same than for the permanent residents of Finland. The right can be proven by presenting a European Health Insurance Card. Urgent medical services are available also for the travellers for some

other country than an EU /EEA, Switzerland or a country with a social security agreement with Finland. However, the full cost of the treatment can be charged. (Kansaneläkelaitos, 2008)

These legislations guide the health care professional in their everyday work. As there are more foreigners in Finland nowadays it is worth knowing what does the law state about foreigners' rights in Finland.

## 5 Pharmacies in Finland

The origin of word "pharmacy" comes from the Greek word pharmakon "remedy". It is believed that the origin of drug therapy and practice started with human civilization. Pharmacy is defined as the body of knowledge of drugs and medicines, their properties, their actions. For centuries pharmacy was a relatively static profession, but in the modern world it has become a changing and dynamic force in the delivery of health care to the general public. Besides selling drugs, pharmacy is an institution which together with other pharmaceutical industry and pharmacists applies body of experimental science to improve and develop medications. (Cowen David L & Helfand William H. 1990.p 11, 17). There is absolutely no doubt that pharmacy in modern life plays a significant role in maintaining the well being of the customers.

Taxation is the key source of finance for the health care system in Finland which includes pharmacies as well. Finnish Medical Agency (Fimea) basically controls the pharmaceutical and medical devices in Finland. Fimea is responsible for supplying medications, locating pharmacies, granting permit for the private owners a monopoly of the sale of OTC drugs and prescription medications. (Mossialos E. & Sirvastava D., 2008).

In 2010 there were all together 811 pharmacies in Finland. Among 811, 617 were the main pharmacies and 194 were branch pharmacies (Suomen Apteekkariliitto, 2010). Beside Nicotine replacement products the pharmacies have only the right to sell prescription and over the counter medicines. The facility of Internet pharmacies do not exist in Finland. Statistics show that the most used over the counter medicine in 2007 in Finland was for the treatment of alimentary tracts and analgesics. Among various alimentary tract and analgesics OTC drugs, laxatives and ibuprofen were the most used over the counter drugs during that particular year. (Finnish Medicines Agency, 2010)

### 5.1 Pharmacists' role towards clients

Pharmacists are health professionals who are experts in the field of medicine which are developed to treat human diseases. In order to give medical advice to the clients' one requires a pharmaceutical degree i.e. the added sound information about medicinal materials and their various effects on humans and the skills to apply theoretical knowledge to practice. Professional pharmacists' tell the customer how the medicine drugs and warns of incompatibility and the potential adverse effects. Pharmacists' also advises on how the medicine should be used and stored safely. Pharmaceutical client is a major objective medical data processor and an interpreter who can explain things clearly and in layman's language. (Apteekkariliitto, 2010)

Pharmacist's work is indeed very responsible and challenging. When clients' visit pharmacies it indicates that either they are having some health problems or their near ones. Pharmacists listens to the clients issues and is able to deal with their affairs competently and compassionately. Pharmacists make sure that the clients get enough medical or health information and hence help them with their problem. (Apteekkariliitto, 2010)

Hence, the role of pharmacists is not limited to only dispensing medications. Pharmacists are the most accessible health care professionals in the health care system and a great medium of maintaining a quality life of people.

## 5.2 Finnish Medicine Agency

Fimea is Finnish Medicines Agency that nationally regulates the pharmaceuticals and which functions are controlled by act and degree. It operates under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health promoting the health of the population by regulating medicinal, tissue and blood products and developing the pharmaceutical factor. Fimea's aim is to enhance the population's pharmaceutical service, and improve the safety, appropriateness and economy of pharmacotherapy. It also provides information about medicines. (Finnish Medicine Agency, 2010)

## 5.3 Legislations on medicinal practices

*Medicine Act 10.4.1987/395* states that medication can be only sold from the pharmacies, and the permission to practice pharmacy comes from Fimea. The permission is personal and not to be rented or assigned to anyone else. The person with the permission is called apothecary. Fimea together with the municipalities decides the need of pharmacies according to the population' demand on the area. The pharmacies are located in Finland so that, if possible, everyone has access to get medicines. All the pharmacies should have enough personnel with

qualification of pharmacist. The apothecary is responsible for supplemental education. (Medicine Act 10.4.1987/395)

The act obligates pharmacists to give guidance on safe and right use of medication to people who buy the medicines. As well as information about the prices and possibilities to change the medication to different manufacturer's product. (Medicine Act 10.4.1987/395)

Even though there are many variation from country to country there are similarities as well. For example in prescriptions written in Nordic countries (including Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark) can also be used in all of the Nordic countries with some limitation. Limitation concerns mainly narcotic and psychotropic medication. (Palonheimo K. 2007)

There are all together many acts that controls, obligates and guides the pharmacies and pharmacists' work in Finland. Owning pharmacy and selling medication is strictly controlled in Finland.

## 6 Over-the-counter medication in Finland

Retail spicers in Britain were known to be the ones who began compounding and selling medicines in 1100s and 12000s. The first recorded apothecary shop to sell medicine was in 1345. However, the first date of the selling medicines still remains unknown. In 1700s chemists and druggists started to sell medicines and dispensed prescriptions. Medicines today are the great contribution of all the chemists, druggists and apothecaries who continuously worked to cure diseases and illness among people for centuries. Medicines today are almost available in any form and also the choices of medicines are almost unlimited. Besides chemical medicines, the growing interest of people in homoeopathy and herbal medicine has added to the number of proprietary medicines that are available today. (Homan Peter G, Hudson Briony & Rowe Raymond C, 2008. p 1, 10)

Over the counter medicines (OTC) simply means medication which anyone can buy from the pharmacies without a doctor's prescription. OTC medicines are commonly used to cure symptoms like pain, cough, allergies, and flu. Like every other drug or medicines over the counter medicines also possess certain side-effects and risks if not used wisely. (American Academy of family physicians, 2009). Some OTC medicines and prescription medicines are equally effective, strong and contain almost the same chemical substance; the only difference is that the amounts of major ingredient in OTC medicines are less compared to prescribed medicines (Apteekkariliitto, 2010). Over the counter medicines are usually advised to be used only for a short period of time. Acetylsalicylic acid, ibuprofen and ketoprofen are anti-inflammatory drugs that are available over the counter without a prescription in Finland. The constant use of any OTC medicine not necessarily increases its effect on body but

possibly add up to adverse reaction. (Finnish Medicines Agency, 2010). Hence, the constant use of any over the counter medicine should be avoided.

These days many over the counter medicines with same chemical content have different brand names, making it more confusing and complicated than ever. It takes only a second to take the wrong medication or wrong amount or even end up in emergency if the instructions are not read carefully. Over the counter medicines are safe when used wisely. Besides that over the counter medicines saves time, provides convenient treatment, saves manpower and also reduces intimate medical problems. (America's medicine cabinet, 2001). However, before using any over the counter medicines it is always good to read its instructions carefully. Also taking advice from pharmacists before starting any over the counter medicines prevents all kinds of medical errors and avoids any potential side effects.

#### 6.1 Safe use of over-the-counter medicines

There are many medications around the world including Finland which can be bought over the counter having one thing in common that is: they are serious medicines that should be taken with high care. Over the counter medicines can be equally harmful as prescription medicines if not used carefully. Like prescription medicines over the counter medicines also has its side effects and can react to other medicines. Hence it is utmost important to be medicine wise while buying and before using any medicine. Here are some important guidelines laid by the consumer health care associations for using over-the-counter medications.

“Always search for only the over the counter medicine which will cure your particular symptoms.”

“When you have founded the right over the counter medicine, always read the entire label which includes active ingredient, uses, warnings, purpose, directions, inactive ingredients and other information”

“Do not guess when it comes to using any medicine, if you have any questions ask pharmacists or doctor.”

“Never take prescription medicines and over the counter medicines at the same time without consulting your doctor.”

“Always use the exact amount of over the counter medicine recommended in the label. If the amount mentioned in the label doesn't work consult your doctor.”

“Always be extra careful before giving any medicines to infants and children. Read the label more than one time and follow the instructions with high care. Remember Infants and

children are not adult!”

“Keep the over the counter medicines as instructed and always remember to check the expiry date before using any medication. Do not use expired date medicines.”

Table 2. Guidelines for using over-the-counter medications. (Consumer healthcare associations, 2010)

These tips are simple yet very informative and to the point. With over the counter medicines or any medicines it is always wise to take double precaution so as to reduce the risk of medicinal accidents.

## 6.2 Availability of over-the-counter medication in Finnish pharmacies

In Finland either the Finnish medicines agency or the European medicines agency decides on the division of medicines as over the counter or prescription. All medicines are carefully studied and researched before they marked as over the counter or prescriptions. In Finland all the prescribed as well over the counter medicines are sold only via pharmacies and hospital pharmacies. In Finland medicines are strictly sold only through pharmacies for the medical safety of the people. The opening hours of pharmacies in Finland are convenient and long, hence the need of selling of medicines in local shops and supermarkets is not seen in Finland. Besides that availability of medicines in local shops can increase the wrong use of medicines, due to lack of professional help misunderstandings can occur and due to the easy excess of medicines from market small pharmacies dry off. (Apteekkariliitto, 2010)

In Finland prescription medicines sell is higher than over the counter medicines, however every second customer in Finnish pharmacies does buy over the counter medicines. Every year sale of over the counter medicines in Finland reaches up to 60 million euro. Pain and fever, cough, allergy, alimentary track medications are mainly the medications which are sold over the counter from Finnish pharmacies. (Ovaskainen Harri & Teräsalmi Eeva, 2010)



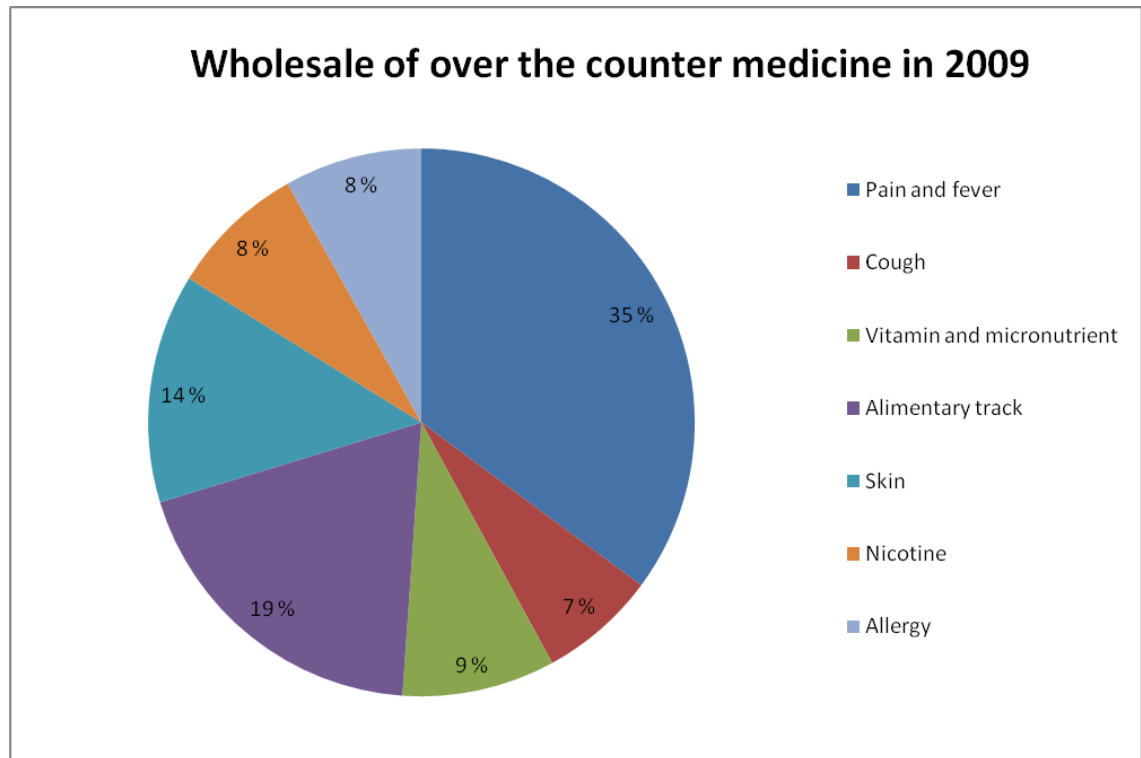


Figure 2. Wholesale of million euros of over the counter medicines in 2009. (Ovaskainen Harri & Teräsalmi Eeva, 2010)

### 6.3 Over-the-counter medication in Finland and other countries

According to the European commission guideline a drug or medicine can be sold over the counter if it is safe, not subject to incorrect use, not too recently introduced and not administered parentally (Finnish Statistics in medicines, 2007). However, even within the European member states there is no such joint law or pharmaceutical minimal standards for pharmacies; it is the government of the country that controls the legislation concerning pharmacies. (Väänänen M, 2008)

Since, there no such harmonized pharmaceutical policies within the EU, the availability of drugs including both OTC and prescription medicines vary a lot. As an example would be comparison of availability of medicines in Spain, Finland and the United Kingdom. Unlike in Spain some sleeping pills, antibiotics and cardiovascular medications requires a doctor's prescription in Finland. (Väänänen M, 2008).

In the United Kingdom over the counter medicines are divided in to two categories depending on the selling place; either only a pharmacy or also retail store. Distinction to Finnish pharmacies are for example *simvastatin* for hypercholesterol, *tamsulosin* for prostata

hyperplasia, *azithromycin* for asymptomatic chlamydia and *tranexamic acid* for profuse menstrual flow which all are available over the counter in British pharmacies. (Ovaskainen H. & Teränsalmi E., 2010)

In the UK people can buy certain amount of pain killers like paracetamol, aspirin and ibuprofen from a regular grocery shops as well as from the internet shops like Pharmacy2u.co.uk's. (The Sunday Times, 2008). Whereas in Finland besides nicotine replacement products, no medication is available in local markets or in internet shops. In fact, buying medicines from internet shop are illegal in Finland (Apteekkariliitto, 2010). Hence, it is highly recommended to consult and do an appropriate research before buying any medicines from other sources than pharmacies in Finland.

## 7 Brochure on over-the-counter medication and Finnish pharmacies

Patient guidance in written and oral form is part of nurses every day work. Research has shown that getting guidance promotes people's capabilities of self-care and decision making. Nowadays people are more aware and interested on their health, partly because of the modernised society and easy access to resources. Care times have shortened which increases the patients' responsibilities of their care and cure. This can be supported with good and detailed patient guidance. Written information supports and helps to remember the oral guidance. (Torkkola S., Heikkinen H., Tiainen S., 2002)

In health care section the use of written patient information and guidance has increased nevertheless there is only little guidelines concerning the content of the health material. This basically means that anyone regardless of the knowledge and profession can write and produce material concerning health issues. Nowadays there is limitless amount of information, also about health, in internet which can be published by anyone. Even though there are very reliable and trustworthy web pages each of us should be critical when searching information. However Finnish centre for health promotion has published its own quality criteria for the health material which has been used as tool in order to produce good quality brochure. The criteria cover content, language, appearance and entirety. (Parkkinen N., Vertio H., Koskinen-Ollonqvist P. 2001, Torkkola S et al 2002)

### 7.1 Quality criteria for health material

The content should have concrete health goal so that the reader catches easily what is the main topic and what is the purpose. The information should be objective, accurate and up to

date. The reader has to be able to trust that the material is evidence based. The amount of information has to be convenient, depending on the purpose of the health material. Some health issues need more detailed other concise and detailed. However it is recommended that text is short and pithy. (Parkkunen N. et al, 2001). In this brochure the topic 'over the counter medicines and Finnish pharmacies' is clearly stated in the cover page, as well as in the content so the purpose and topic is easily seen when glancing the paper. References used to produce the brochure were mainly written after the year 2000, the newest even from the year 2011 so that the information is as recent as possible. By using official Finnish web pages such as Finnish Medicine Agency and Association of Finnish Pharmacies and reliable scientific resources such as articles found through SAGE search the information is evidence based and accurate. Also by offering links to useful web pages related to the information in the brochure the readers can find more information on their interest.

The main concepts of language are easy-to-read and understandable. It is good to avoid complex and difficult structures and concepts. Also the way of presenting affects the understanding, writing in positive way is useful. Understandable text has short, familiar and common words, plenty of verbs and nouns, little adjectives and adverbs. Sentences are short and the structure is easy, clear and the text proceeds logically. It is important to remember the target group throughout so the text is written precisely to them. (Parkkunen N. et al. 2001.) As the target group for the brochure English speaking foreigners in Finland the information was written from the foreigners' point of view. Because the target group is very wide in terms of the background and education level of the readers the text was written by using common everyday words. Technical and professional words were avoided. The brochure aims to offer general, simple and clear information on Finnish policies concerning pharmacies and over the counter medication. It was decided that too many details are excluded so that the readers' interest is retained and like mentioned earlier links to related web pages were added.

The material should raise interest; it is the first impact that has impact whether the reader wants to take closer look of the material. The way text and possible pictures has been written and placed is the very first thing that reader notices. Appearance has to be distinct. The font style and size together with layout, contrast, illustration and colours affect this. Font style has to be simple and clear like Arial, Gill or Verdana. Size needs to be at least 12. The layout can be made clear by using paragraph, columns, titles, and sufficient line spacing. Contrast between the text and background has to be good. The most recommended is white background with black, dark green or dark blue text. Also yellow or pastille green colours are acceptable. Illustration is useful in health materials as it is easier to remember information when text is combined with picture. (Parkkunen N. et al. 2001.) Like recommended the font size is in the brochure 12 and style Arial. Line spacing is 1,5 which is sufficient. Text is divided into five subsections with clear titles. The size of the brochure is A5 text so the text

is written in one column in order not to make the lines too short. A5 size was decided together with the pharmacy. Text is black through the brochure and background white making the contrast good. Also brochures with pastille blue background were printed in order to differentiate, the pastille blue colour was chosen because there were no pastille green cardboard available. All together five pictures from Word Clip Art and one photo from Tapiola Pharmacy were placed in the brochure. Pictures are related to medicines and pharmacy and they are intended to make the brochure more interesting and easier to remember.

## 7.2 Choosing the material for the brochure

In the beginning of the thesis project the purpose was to produce a brochure on over the counter medication in Finland for foreigners. However gradually after discussing with a pharmacist from Tapiola Pharmacy it was decided to add also general information about pharmacies in Finland. Pharmaceutical policies vary a lot between all the countries. Because the target group is English speaking foreigners the content and information was chosen for people who might not be familiar with Finnish policies concerning pharmacies and over the counter medication.

For 'Pharmacies in Finland' chapter was chosen couple basic facts about pharmacies. The opening hours were mentioned because especially it varies a lot between different countries, and it was thought that it is important to inform that some pharmacies are open late in Finland.

In 'Pharmaceutical policies in Finland' was briefly mentioned about Fimea because it is very important and significant agency related to medical concerns in Finland. The pharmacist suggested that it would be good to mention about laws concerning the foreigner health care generally in Finland, so it was mentioned there. Link to The Social Insurance Institution of Finland web page was added as there can be found considerable amount of useful information. Because there so much information available it would have been impossible to choose the most useful ones for the target group as there are people with need of very different information. Internationalism has increased and people are travelling more it was decided to write shortly about the rules concerning carrying medication when travelling from and to Finland. Information about the usability of prescription was asked from pharmacy to be added. Again links related to issues on the chapter were added for people to read more if wished so.

Chapter 'What is over the counter medicine?' informs shortly what they are and how they differ from prescription medicines in Finland. More detailed information on OTC medicines in Finland is later on the brochure in own chapter.

The next chapter contains information about safe use of OTC medicines. It is important to know how to use OTC medicines as they are freely available for customer in pharmacies. Also misuse of OTC medicines can cause severe problems. The role of pharmacist was also emphasized as they are in the pharmacies to help customer who have any questions or suspicion about medicines they are using or in need of buying. The tips were taken from Consumer health care products association (2010) and summarized so that it took one page from the brochure because too much information would bore the reader.

In the end of the brochure is written about the OTC medicines available in Finland. The amount of OTC medicines in Finland is wide so it was self evident that not everything could be added. The main groups were mentioned and what kinds of products are available. The writers and the pharmacy together decided not to mention any active substances as the situation changes all the time and the brochure would not be valid after the changes.

## 8 Evaluation of the project

The method of doing this thesis was literature review using reliable and appropriate sources as references. The references used were be up to date. Besides, enlarging knowledge about the topic, researchers decided to scan literature efficiently using manual or computerized methods, to identify a set of useful articles, journals and books. Through literature review the researchers found the information needed for producing the brochure. Finnish centre for health promotion have published quality criteria for the health material (see chapter 5) which were used when making the outlook and the structure of the brochure. The feedback given from our tutor teachers and project partners were highly considered while working on the final brochure. The final product was evaluated by the pharmacist in Tapiola pharmacy through questionnaire. All necessary changes were made by the writers based on the feedback received.

The brochure aims to be reliable and contain enough but not too much information for foreigners. During the thesis process the writers visited pharmacy two times and contacted a pharmacist several times in order to produce brochure which will serve the working life. The final product was also evaluated by the writers using the criteria for health material in order to be good in quality. The final brochure is given to pharmacy in printed and electronical form so that they can print more of them when needed.

### 8.1 Self-evaluation of the brochure

The final product was evaluated by the writers according to the criteria for the health material written by Parkkunen et al. (2001). In the chapter 6 this criteria was went through.

Criteria for the content was fulfilled by setting a health goal to increase English speaking foreigner's knowledge about over the counter medicines and Finnish pharmaceutical policies. References that were used are mainly written after the year 2000 and are from evidence based and scientific resources. This made the information reliable and up to date. And as recommended the information was written as short way as possible and in addition there are internet links to useful websites on related issues. The oral and written feedback from a pharmacist from Tapiola pharmacy has helped and guided to produce a reliable health material.

Related to appearance there were quite strict guidelines which were taken into consideration in order that it would serve its purpose for the pharmacy and foreigners. Font style was chosen to be Arial which was recommended because of its simplicity and clarity. Size is 12 in text parts, and 16 in the cover page. The recommendation was at least 12. Contrast between the text and background was made clear with white or light blue background and black text. Relevant pictures were added so that it would be easier remembered and look more interesting. Layout was made clear by dividing the text into several paragraphs with titles and using line spacing 1,5.

## 8.2 Feedback from the pharmacy

The very first version of the brochure was sent by e-mail and appointment to pharmacy was agreed in order to get feedback. The pharmacist evaluated this version and was satisfied with it. Especially with the information and the length of the brochure. Some adverbs wanted to be changed or taken away as they too strong or mild such as never, always and important. She also gave more useful information and facts that could be included. Pictures from the brochure were not included yet. After the feedback the brochure was modified and self-drawn pictures and one photo taken in the pharmacy was added.

Questionnaire (see appendix) was also sent to pharmacy when the brochure was nearly done. In that phase the feedback contained improvement suggestions concerning the spelling and choosing the wording, quality of pictures and the size of the brochure. They also wanted to include the logo of Tapiola Pharmacy in the brochure. Also positive feedback was given; brochure contains lot of good information, references are included which make the brochure trustworthy and that the brochure will be useful for the pharmacy.

All the feedback was considered very useful and changes according to it were made. The size of the brochure was already A5 which also the pharmacy suggested but because it was send in electronically and not explained well the size was misunderstood.

When the final version of the brochure was done the pharmacy was very satisfied with it. Feedback from the pharmacy concerned the facts, grammatical corrections and generally the outlook. Even though the questionnaire was sent, and there was a question 'Do you think the

brochure will be beneficial to the pharmacy, if yes how? 'The answer was 'yes, it will be useful'. Also final verdict of the brochure was asked, but there were still changes to make so it was commented to be answered later. Final evaluation from the Tapiola pharmacy confirmed satisfaction towards the final outcome of the thesis.

## 9 Ethical consideration and trustworthiness

Ethics in research can be considered to be the degree to which the research conforms to moral standards, including issues related to professional, legal and social accountability. Harm and exploitations of all research participants must be avoided. (Polit, D. F & Hungler, B. P.1997). Careful ethical considerations were undertaken at the beginning of the project by informing, gaining approval and consulting the supervisors and work life partner. An official thesis contract was signed by all the parties involved with the thesis. During the process of writing the thesis, the writers visited couple of times to Tapiola pharmacy for consultations and for further guidelines. The writers were constantly in touch with the tutors as well as the working life partner via email. Their feedback and recommendations were highly considered while realizing the thesis. Writers of the thesis believe to have obliged to maintain strict ethical considerations to avoid any harm to all the participants involved in the project. All matters like informed consent, reliability, authorization and confidentiality were highly considered while carrying out the study.

Trustworthiness is a significant component of qualitative research. Researchers look to fulfill three criteria which are credibility, dependability and conformability for ensuring trustworthiness. Credibility is fulfilled by presenting a true picture of the scrutiny, dependability by striving other researcher to repeat the study and conformability by presenting the findings from the data without our own presuppositions. (Shenton Andrew K. 2004).

During the literature gathering process, it was essential that research articles based upon empirical studies and reliable official electronic pages. To ensure compliance with these criteria, the writers used professional, scientific databases and peer reviewed scientific journals. Electronic databases like SAGE, OVID, EBSCO and Science Direct. Manual literature research such as book and brochure both in Finnish and English that were related to over-the-counter brochure, Finnish pharmaceutical policies and foreigners in Finland were carried out during the process of literature research. Since, our study revolved around Finnish pharmaceuticals policies, Foreigners in Finland and over-the-counter medications, official internet pages like [apteekkariliito.fi](http://apteekkariliito.fi), [maahanmuutovirasto.fi](http://maahanmuutovirasto.fi), [tilastokeskus.fi](http://tilastokeskus.fi), Finnish medicines Agency [fimea.fi](http://fimea.fi) were the most potential source of literature research for this study. Tapiola pharmacy also provided the writers a lot of brochure in Finnish which was also

very significant source of literature for this study. The comparable model for ensuring the trustworthiness was realized by the writers while conducting the research. Intense study was conducted while accumulating the data for the thesis. Similarly, the information gathered was continuously assessed by the tutors as well as the working life partner. The information and data realized in the thesis do not include any presuppositions of the writers, hence can be trusted.

## 10 Discussion

The aim of this study was to increase foreigner's knowledge on Finnish policies concerning over the counter medication and pharmacies. The project was undertaken in collaboration with Tapiola Pharmacy. The brochure focuses on over the counter medication and generally on Finnish pharmacies from the foreigner's perspective.

The amount of information available in present society is huge. Also in this work it was challenging to define adequate amount of information for the theoretical part and brochure. Because the key concepts were wide there was great deal of information available. Since the subject was reviewed in a way from foreigners' aspect there were not that many studies in English about Finland or related to Finnish practices. Many internet references were used such as Apteekkariliitto's home page but it was later acknowledged that some of the information was updated and some were not available anymore. As Finnish official web pages were used, not all of the information was available in English so the Finnish information had to be translated into English.

Challenges of practice-based thesis were encountered as it is relatively new way of doing thesis. There were no books available in English in Laurea library, only one Finnish book was found so all the information had to be translated. The way of doing practice-based thesis differs from qualitative and quantitative as it does not have research questions and findings or results; and this was not clear for the writers in the beginning of this study process.

Making the brochure itself was rewarding and interesting. It was made by using regular Microsoft Word program which probably was not the most practical one. It was difficult to arrange text, pictures and page number on desired places and the outlook seemed to change every time when saved document was opened.

The feedback from the Tapiola Pharmacy served as a tool for the improvement of the brochure. It would have been interesting and useful to get more qualitative feedback about the brochure from the pharmacy and not just improvement suggestions. As the thesis supervising was extra work for the pharmacy there was delay in getting feedback which



affected the time schedule of the thesis. Because the time to do this thesis was limited and it took long time to get any feedback from the pharmacy no more questionnaires were sent or visits made. Instead of sending a questionnaire to pharmacy by interviewing them we might have gained exactly the kind of feedback that we wanted.

Recommendations for the further studies on the basis of this thesis would concern the following: the brochure that was outcome of this thesis could be evaluated by the target group and developed according to their feedback. Possibly divide this brochure on two separate ones with more detailed information; one on over the counter medication and one on the Finnish pharmacies. Instead of consulting a pharmacist, the foreigners in Finland could be studied to get information on what kind of health material they require. Generally on the topic that was studied it can be said that creating more health information in English or other foreign languages would be useful. There are more and more health material /patient guides available in Finnish which also could be translated in English (or other languages than Finnish or Swedish).

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Appendix 2: A guide to pharmaceutical policies and over the counter medication in Finland

A guide to pharmaceutical policies and  
over the counter medication in Finland



May 2011

To the reader,

The main purpose of this brochure is to extend the importance of over the counter medicines and give brief information on pharmaceutical legislation in Finland. Our main goal is to reach the English speaking foreigners in Finland seeking medical information in English via Tapiola Pharmacy. Nevertheless, this brochure can be used in an appropriate manner by anybody regardless of age, sex and ethnicity.

This brochure is a product of our thesis work which was produced in collaboration with our working partner Tapiola Pharmacy. Pictures in this brochure are from Word clip-art and Tapiola Pharmacy.

Nursing students,

Tsering Gurung and Sari Levänen

Otaniemi, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, 2011



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## 1. Pharmacies in Finland

Taxation is the main source of health system in Finland which includes pharmacies as well.

In 2010 there were altogether 811 pharmacies in Finland. Among 811 pharmacies, 617 were main pharmacies and 194 were subsidiary pharmacies.

The opening hours are one of the longest in Europe. There is also a University Pharmacy in Helsinki which is open 24 hours every day.

All prescription and over the counter medicines except nicotine products are strictly distributed only by pharmacies.



For more information visit: <http://www.apteekkariliitto.fi>

## 2. Pharmaceutical policies in Finland

Finnish Medical Agency (FIMEA) controls the pharmaceutical and medical devices in Finland. It is responsible for example supplying the medications, locating pharmacies, and granting permits to own a pharmacy. It operates under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and all the functions are controlled by act and decree, *Medicine Act 10.4.1987/395*.

There are certain laws and regulations related to health care services concerning the foreigners living in Finland permanently or temporarily.

Detailed information on health care services in Finland for foreigners is available from Kela web page.

<http://www.kela.fi> -> *moving to or from Finland*

An individual from Non-EEA (Non-European Economy Area) is allowed to bring any medication with a marketing authorization for his/her personal use for maximum of 3 months. Mail-order medicinal products from Non-EEA are strictly prohibited.

An person from European Economy Area (EEA) is allowed to bring any medication with a marketing authorization for his/her personal use for maximum of 12 months. Amounts of medicines equivalent to a maximum of 3 month's use can be received by post from an EEA country.

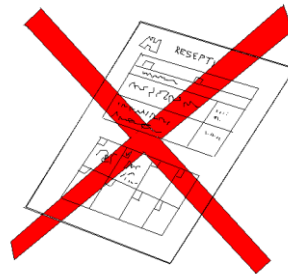
When carrying narcotic or psychotropic medication in the Schengen area, you need to proof the essentiality with a Schengen certificate. You can ask the certificate from pharmacies. In Finland it can be written only for permanent residents of Finland.

Prescriptions written in Europe are acceptable in Finnish pharmacies.

More information: [www.finlex.fi](http://www.finlex.fi) (Legislative information)  
[www.kela.fi](http://www.kela.fi) (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland)  
[www.fimea.fi](http://www.fimea.fi)

### 3. What is an over the counter medicine?

Over the counter medicines (OTC) simply means medication which anyone can buy from the pharmacies without a doctor's prescription.



Over the counter medicines are usually advised to be used only for a short period of time.

The constant use of any OTC medicine does not increase its effect on body but possibly adds the side-effects.

Availability and brand names of the OTC medicines may differ from country to country.

Many OTC medicines are same as prescription medicines but in smaller packages.

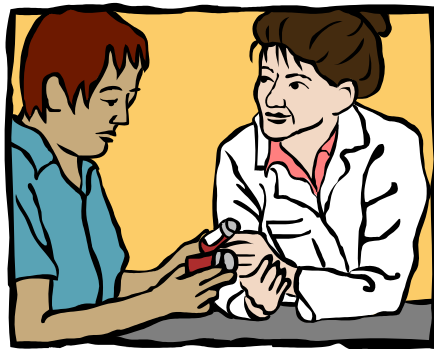
More information: [www.fimea.fi](http://www.fimea.fi)

[www.ismp.org/tools/ISMP-MedCabinet10.pdf](http://www.ismp.org/tools/ISMP-MedCabinet10.pdf)

#### 4. Safe use of over the counter medicines

Over the counter medicines (OTC) can be equally harmful as prescription medicines if not used wisely. Hence, the safe use of over the counter medicines is crucial.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to ask from the pharmacy.



For more information:

[http://otcsafety.org/uploads/files/publications/Treat\\_With\\_Care.pdf](http://otcsafety.org/uploads/files/publications/Treat_With_Care.pdf)

*Here are a few tips which are important to observe before buying or using any OTC medicine.*

~ Always search for an over the counter medicine which will cure your particular symptoms. If possible, ask a pharmacist which medicine would suit your needs best.

~ Read the entire label and ask a pharmacist about the possible interactions with other medicines you are using.

~ Consult your doctor or pharmacist before using prescription and over the counter medicines at the same time.

~ Take the exact dose of the medicine recommended in the label.

~ Be extra careful before giving any medicines to infants, children and pregnant women.

~ Never use expired medicines! Remember to return all the used syringes, needles and leftover medicines to your nearest pharmacy.

## 5. Over the counter medicines in Finland

There comes a time when everyone of us needs medication for temporary problems, such as pain and fever, cough, allergy and alimentary track problems.

In pharmacies not the entire over the counter medication are available on the shelves, but will be given to you by a pharmacists with extra guidance. Such as emergency contraceptive.

*List of medication sold over the counter in Finland:*

*[http://www.fimea.fi/instancedata/prime\\_product\\_julkaisu/fimea/embeds/fimeawwwstructure/16971\\_muu\\_ohjeistus\\_Itsehoito\\_2003\\_suomi.pdf](http://www.fimea.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/fimea/embeds/fimeawwwstructure/16971_muu_ohjeistus_Itsehoito_2003_suomi.pdf)*





**Alimentary track:** products for constipation, diarrhea, gastro esophageal reflux, nausea, flatulence and lactose intolerance. Also lactic acid bacteria products.

**Pain and fever:** different anti-inflammatory pain and fever reducing medication in tablet, suppository, gel and liquid form.

**Cough:** expectorants, cough suppressants, throat pastilles

**Nicotine products:** variation of patches, chewing gums, tablets and inhalators

**Allergy:** cortisone and antihistamine tablets, cremes , nose sprays and eye drops

**Intimate:** different products for yeast, hemorrhoids, threadworms, menopause symptoms and emergency contraceptives

**Others** for example herpes, louse and acne medication, vitamins and minerals



“Remember to dispose your unused and expired medication to pharmacies”

Tapiola Pharmacy  
Kauppamiehentie 6, 02100 Espoo  
[www.tapiolanapteekki.fi](http://www.tapiolanapteekki.fi)

