



*Back to School!*



## PIC QUESTION OF THE WEEK: 8/24/09

Q: What is your opinion of splitting tablets to reduce drug costs?

A: The splitting of pharmaceutical tablets is now common; however, this practice has recently undergone closer scrutiny. Although there are a number of reasons for splitting tablets, the primary factor is monetary savings. Physicians routinely write prescriptions for a tablet size that doubles the individual dose and instruct patients to *break them in half*. Several large hospitals, including those of the Veterans Administration (VA), have implemented tablet splitting policies for specific drugs that produce millions of dollars in savings. In one case, application of the program to simvastatin had the potential to save the entire VA system almost \$50 million yearly. In most studies, the actual weight of *each* of the half-tablets was not equal to 50% of the expected weight of the whole tablet. Regardless, the use of half tablets resulted in clinical responses similar to those of whole tablets in trials of drugs such as simvastatin and lisinopril. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently distributed a consumer update on this practice (see reference and link below). The FDA and American Medical Association do not recommend that patients split tablets unless this recommendation is specifically cited in the product labeling. The agency suggests that all patients seek the advice of their physician or pharmacist before arbitrarily splitting any tablets. Specific points to remember include:

- Do not attempt to split enteric coated or *un-scored* extended release tablets.
- Small tablets and those with unusual shapes may be difficult to accurately split.
- Factors such as visual acuity, fine motor skills, and mental capacity are critical in any successful attempt to accurately split tablets.
- Tablet splitting devices are more effective than halving by knife, fingers, etc.
- Combination products containing the same amount of the second ingredient will yield only one-half the desired dose when split.
- The presence of a score mark does not ensure more accurate splitting of tablets.
- If possible, patients should split tablets on an individual basis as the over-under weighting of each half will balance the dose of the entire tablet.

The careful splitting of tablets under appropriate circumstances and by competent patients/providers can be a safe and cost-effective method of drug administration.

### References:

- Food and Drug Administration. Consumer Health Information. Tablet splitting: a risky practice. <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm171492.htm>. Accessed August 11, 2009.
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- Parra DB, Raval NP, Schnacky HS, et al. Effect of splitting simvastatin tablets for control of low-density lipoproteins. *Am J Cardiol* 2005;95:1481-3.

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