Mysterious meds arrive in the mail

Dear Alice,

My boyfriend received a package of unknown white pills in the mail with no return address. He doesn't know who sent them or what the pills are. To my horror he took one while out drinking one night but there was no noticeable effect. How/where can I find out what these pills are? They are round white tablets thicker than aspirin and have the numbers 54 543 imprinted on one side. I'm afraid to ask my pharmacist in case this might actually be a controlled substance. Can you help?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Hmmm? it seems strange that an unknown person or company would send your boyfriend an unmarked package of pills, for no apparent reason. These things happen, but it's understandable to be concerned about your boyfriend's actions in taking the pills. Before sleuthing around on your own, you may want to try talking about these events with him. Is it possible that the parcel was joke mail from a friend? Could your boyfriend have an ailment unknown to you? Does he share the same name as a family member? Could your boyfriend be dabbling in illicit drug use and trying to keep it a secret?

Your concern that your boyfriend took one of the pills (and with alcohol) is completely understandable. It is risky to ingest any pills that are unknown, and especially, unidentified. This is similar to the idea that sharing prescription drugs is not a good plan. Moreover, mixing alcohol with other substances can have unexpected, and sometimes dangerous, consequences.

You may want to talk with him about these issues, regardless of the true identity of these pills. Some ideas for conversation starters are:

- "I'm concerned that you took one of those pills. I care about you, and wouldn't want anything bad to happen to you."
- "I'm curious about what made you decide to pop one of those pills the other night."
- "I'm confused about this whole situation. How are you feeling about it?"
- "When you took that pill the other night, what were you hoping would happen?"

If there's still no explanation, or if you're not satisfied with one that's given, you and your mate could put the pills in a secure container and save the envelope they arrived in. You could
bring the pills to your pharmacist to have them identified. However, if you are concerned about their origin and the possibility that they are a controlled substance, you can consider reporting them to the postal service or police, who can help track their origin.

Your experience is a good reminder for all of us to periodically check our medicine cabinets for any expired, re-bottled, or unidentified pills hanging around. The safest bet is to keep all medications in their original bottles or packets, with pertinent labeling and instructions attached, to avoid confusion and mistakes. Also, dispose of medications, both prescription and over-the-counter, by the date of expiration printed on their original packaging.

Good luck with your investigation.

Alice!

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