

Dangerous Abbreviations, Symbols and Dose Designations

The abbreviations, symbols, and dose designations found in this table have been reported as being frequently misinterpreted and involved in harmful medication errors. They should NEVER be used when communicating medication information.

Abbreviation	Intended Meaning	Problem	Use Instead
U	Unit	Mistaken for "0" (zero), "4" (four), or cc.	unit
IU	International unit	Mistaken for "IV" (intravenous) or "10" (ten).	unit
Abbreviations for drug names		Misinterpreted because of similar abbreviations for multiple drugs; e.g., MS, MSO ₄ (morphine sulphate), MgSO ₄ (magnesium sulphate) may be confused for one another.	full drug names
QD QOD	Every day Every other day	QD and QOD have been mistaken for each other, or as 'QID'. The Q has also been misinterpreted as "2" (two).	daily every other day
OD	Every Day	Mistaken for "right eye" (OD = oculus dexter).	daily
OS, OD, OU	Left eye, right eye, both eyes	May be confused with one another.	left eye, right eye both eyes
D/C	Discharge	Interpreted as "discontinue whatever medications follow" (typically discharge medications).	discharge.
cc	cubic centimetre	Mistaken for "u" (units).	mL
µg	microgram	Mistaken for "mg" (milligram) resulting in one thousand-fold overdose.	mcg
Symbol	Intended Meaning	Potential Problem	Use Instead
@	at	Mistaken for "2" (two) or "5" (five).	at
> <	Greater than Less than	Mistaken for "7" (seven) or the letter "L". Confused with each other.	greater than/above less than/below
Dose Designation	Intended Meaning	Potential Problem	Use Instead
Trailing zero	x.0 mg	Decimal point is overlooked resulting in 10-fold dose error.	Never use a zero by itself after a decimal point: X mg
Lack of leading zero	.X mg	Decimal point is overlooked resulting in 10-fold dose error.	Always use a zero before a decimal point: 0. X mg

Adapted from ISMP Canada's "Do Not Use" List (2006) at: <http://www.ismp-canada.org/dangerousabbreviations.htm>