



Halachos of
**MEDICINE
ON SHABBOS**



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Please note that the material presented is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to the halachos of Medicine on Shabbos. In any case of question or doubt a Rabbi should be consulted.

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Day 1

Introduction: Generally speaking, Chazal prohibited performing *refuah* (healing procedures) on Shabbos. Chazal were concerned that in one's haste to try and get well, they may inadvertently transgress Shabbos (in the preparation of medication or in other ways). Nonetheless, there are many instances where one is permitted to perform *refuah* or take medicine on Shabbos. The halachos pertaining to *refuah* on Shabbos are wide-ranging and intricate. This month, we will focus **exclusively** on the halachos regarding taking **medicine** on Shabbos. All methods of taking medication (i.e. orally, topically, by suppository or by injection etc.) are subject to the prohibition of *refuah* on Shabbos.

שו"ע ריש ס' שכח



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Day 2

One who is suffering discomfort or feels mildly unwell (i.e. a common cold), is prohibited from taking medicine on Shabbos. This includes even one who is taking prescribed pain medication*. However, one who feels so unwell that they need to lie down, or that their ability to function normally is impaired (i.e. a migraine headache), is **permitted** to take medicine on Shabbos. This is referred to as *choleh kol gufo* (lit. one whose entire body is sick). Henceforth, the term *choleh* will be used to refer to a person in this situation.

*Note: The halacha regarding antibiotics will be discussed below.

שו"ע ורמ"א ס' שכח סל"ז, מ"ב סק"ק, רפואת ישראל ע' טז



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Day 3

It was previously mentioned that one who feels so unwell that they need to lie down, is permitted to take medicine on Shabbos. Even in the event that one is not actually going to lie down, as long as they feel the need to do so, they are permitted to take medicine. For example, Sarah has a severe stomach cramp and feels she needs to lie down. However, because she cannot leave her children unattended, she forces herself to remain active and not lie down. In such an instance, Sarah is permitted to take medicine because she is halachically considered a *choleh*.

שו"ע ורמ"א ס' שכח סל"ז, מ"ב סק"ק, רפואת ישראל ע' טז



Day 4

Chazal's prohibition against taking medicine applies only to taking medication on Shabbos itself. One may take slow-release medicine on Erev Shabbos which will continuously release medication into one's body on Shabbos.

רפואת ישראל ע' 12



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Day 5

It was previously mentioned that one who is merely suffering discomfort or feels slightly unwell is prohibited from taking medicine on Shabbos. This halacha applies to Yom Tov as well. However, on the second day of Yom Tov, one is always permitted to take medicine. An exception to this leniency is the second day of Rosh Hashana, which in this regard has the same status as Shabbos and the first day of Yom Tov.

שו"ע ורמ"א ס' תצו ס"ב, מ"ב סק"ו



Day 6

One who anticipates that if they do not take medicine, then they will reach the stage of *choleh*, is permitted to take medicine immediately in order to prevent them from reaching that stage.

To illustrate: Leah is prone to migraine headaches. As soon as Leah begins to feel a slight headache which notes the onset of a migraine, she may immediately take medicine. This leniency applies even if one projects that they will not reach the stage of *choleh* until after Shabbos is over (i.e. Leah feels the onset of the headache at *shalosh seudos* and knows it will not develop into a full blown migraine until Shabbos is over).

שש"כ פל"ד סט"ז, ארחות שבת פ"כ הערה קפ"ב



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Day 7

If one is unsure if they are considered a *choleh* or not, they may be lenient and assume that they are considered a *choleh* and take medicine on Shabbos. This halacha includes two scenarios:

A) One who suspects they have a particular illness which would permit taking medication on Shabbos but are unsure, may take medication because of the **possibility** that they are indeed a *choleh*.

B) One who feels quite unwell but is unsure if they have crossed the threshold of “not being able to function properly” or “need to lie down”, may be lenient and assume that they are considered *choleh*, and take medicine. If possible, in such an instance one should try to consult with a Rov.

שו"ת מנחת שלמה תנינא ס' ס אות ט"ו



Day 8

Children until the age of nine are automatically considered *cholim*. Therefore, until this age, children may be given medicine on Shabbos even for a minor ailment or sickness.

רמ"א ס' שכח סי"ז, שש"כ פל"ז ס"ב



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Day 9

A pregnant woman **is not** considered a *choleh* and is subject to the regular conditions of taking medicine on Shabbos. For thirty days following childbirth, a woman **is** automatically considered a *choleh* and may take medication even for a minor ailment or sickness.

ארחות שבת פ"כ סקנ"ז, שו"ע ס' של ס"ד



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Day 10

A *choleh* who is permitted to take medicine on Shabbos may only take medicine needed to heal the particular illness that rendered them a *choleh*. Although they are considered a *choleh*, they may not take medicine to treat other ailments. For example, Rivkah has a migraine headache and is permitted to take Tylenol to relieve it. However, her status as *choleh* notwithstanding, she may not take her allergy medication.

שו"ת אג"מ ח"ג ס' נג



Day 11

It was previously mentioned that one may not take medicine to relieve a mere ailment on Shabbos. However, if the individual suffering the ailment is in poor health, and there is cause for concern that if left untreated, the illness could spread and become life-threatening, then taking medication is permitted.

To illustrate: Dinah, an elderly woman, contracted a yeast infection. Typically, such an infection is not debilitating nor dangerous, and one would not be permitted to take medicine for its treatment on Shabbos. However, due to Dinah's advanced age, there is concern that if the infection spreads it may become life-threatening. As such, Dinah may take medicine to treat the infection on Shabbos.

רפואת ישראל ע' 5



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Day 12

Generally speaking, medicine is considered *muktzah* on Shabbos. This applies even if the medicine has an enjoyable taste.

Nevertheless, when one is allowed to take medicine on Shabbos, the medicine may be handled in order to use it. One may not move the leftover medicine after one has taken their dosage (to be continued).

שש"כ פל"ד ס"ג בהגהה



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Day 13

It was previously mentioned that generally speaking, medicine is considered *muktzah* on Shabbos. Nonetheless, if prior to Shabbos one was not feeling well (or had a sick family member in their household), then the medicine is considered "prepared" for Shabbos use and is not *muktzah*. Consequently, the medicine may be moved even when not being used to treat the sickness (to be continued).

שש"כ פל"ג ס"ד בהגהה



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Day 14

We previously learned when medicine is considered *muktzah* on Shabbos. To illustrate the previous halachos: One Friday night, Rachel's son, Yosef, woke up not feeling well. Rachel took out a bottle of liquid Tylenol, placed it on a dresser and gave some to Yosef. After giving Yosef the Tylenol, Rachel wants to put it back into the medicine cabinet. Is this permitted? Based on what was discussed the halacha is as follows: If Yosef was feeling unwell going into Shabbos, then the Tylenol is not *muktzah* and may be returned to its place. If Yosef felt fine when Shabbos began and only began feeling unwell now, the Tylenol is considered *muktzah* and must be left on the dresser*.

*Note: If one is concerned that it might be dangerous to leave the medicine where it is, the medicine may be moved under all circumstances. In a household with little children, some maintain that the medicine may always be moved.

שש"כ פל"ד ס"ג בהגהה



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Day 15

One is permitted to dissolve a pill in water on Shabbos. It is also permitted to crush a pill or cut it in half on Shabbos.

שש"כ פל"ד ס"ד, שו"ע ס' שכא סי"ב



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Day 16

It is permitted to dilute medicinal syrup on Shabbos.

שש"כ פל"ד ס"ד



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Day 17

Chazal only prohibited taking **medicine** on Shabbos to provide *refuah* (healing).

However, one may eat food that is regularly consumed by healthy people, even if one's particular intent is for the healing benefit that it provides. For example, Tzipporah has a sore throat. Because she can function properly and is not confined to bed, she is not considered a *choleh* and may not take a cough drop. However, she may drink a hot tea even if she is doing so solely for the sake of relieving her discomfort. This leniency applies even if Tzipporah never drinks hot tea.

שו"ע ס' שכח סל"ז, ארחות שבת פ"כ הערה קפו



Day 18

It was previously mentioned that substances that healthy people regularly consume may be taken on Shabbos for the sake of healing. It must be stressed that this leniency only applies to substances that are **primarily** consumed as food by healthy people. Something that is edible but not usually consumed by a healthy person is considered medicine and may not be taken on Shabbos. Examples of this include Tums, Halls and other similar sucking candies. One who is unsure about the status of a particular substance should consult with a Rov.

שו"ע ס' שכח סל"ז, ספר רפואת ישראל ע' יט



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Day 19

One who is experiencing nausea but does not feel the need to lie down etc. is not considered a *choleh* and may not take medicine to help them vomit (i.e. Gravel etc.). However, one is permitted to stick a finger down their throat to help them vomit.

שו"ע ס' שכח סל"ט



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Day 20

It is questionable whether or not one may take sleeping pills on Shabbos. Some *poskim* rule leniently, because they do not view taking a sleeping pill as a form of healing. Others adopt a more stringent position and prohibit taking sleeping pills on Shabbos. In the event that if one does not sleep, they will suffer great discomfort, one may certainly take sleeping pills on Shabbos.

רפואת ישראל ע' 35, שש"כ פל"ג סט"ז



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Day 21

Let us now turn our attention to the status of vitamins on Shabbos. Vitamins taken as a nutritional supplement may be taken on Shabbos by a **healthy person** who is not nutritionally deficient (to be continued).

שש"כ פל"ד ס"כ, הערה פ"ב



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Day 22

It was previously mentioned that vitamins taken as a nutritional supplement may be taken on Shabbos by a healthy person. One may not take a vitamin on Shabbos which is meant to compensate for a negative health condition. This includes taking vitamins to help recover from a sickness (i.e. vitamin C), or to restore some physical deficiency (i.e. one who takes iron pills because they are low on iron). Often, one can avoid the need to take a vitamin on Shabbos by instead taking one immediately before and after Shabbos (to be continued).

שש"כ פל"ד ס"כ, שו"ת אג"מ ח"ג ס' נד



Day 23

Children until the age of nine for whom the doctor has prescribed taking vitamins are permitted to take them on Shabbos.*

*Note: Vitamins that taste good require a bracha.

שש"כ פל"ד ס"ד



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Day 24

Although it has been discussed that one may not take medicine on Shabbos for a mere ailment or discomfort, if one is on medication that needs to be taken for a number of consecutive days, there are *poskim* who permit the medication to be taken on Shabbos (i.e. acne medication etc.). In the event that skipping a day will not make a difference, then the medication may not be taken on Shabbos. [It seems that general practice is to permit taking antibiotics on Shabbos under all circumstances.]

שש"כ פל"ד סי"ז, אג"מ ח"ג ס' נג,
ספר ל"ט מלאכות ע' 485



Day 25

A person who cannot function normally without medication due to a psychological condition (i.e. anxiety, depression etc.), is considered a *choleh* and may take their medication on Shabbos.

רפואת ישראל ע' 43



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Day 26

It has been repeatedly mentioned that one may not take medicine on Shabbos to relieve discomfort. Is there any solution for such a person? According to some *poskim*, **prior** to Shabbos one is permitted to **dissolve** (not just hide) medicine in regular food, and later on Shabbos, eat the food in a manner that is not apparent that one is eating it for the sake of healing (to be continued).

שש"כ פל"ד ס"ה, שו"ת אגרו"מ ח"ב ס' פו



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Day 27

It was previously mentioned that one may dissolve medicine into food **prior** to Shabbos to be consumed on Shabbos for one who is suffering discomfort. In the event that the medicine in question is usually consumed in this manner (i.e. medicinal drops in water), it is questionable if this method may be employed (to be continued).

שש"כ פל"ד ס"ה, ארחות שבת פ"כ הערה קצ"א



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Day 28

We have learned that the solution to mix medicine into food before Shabbos only applies when it is not apparent on Shabbos itself that one is consuming the food for its medicinal benefit. Based on this, may one add medicinal syrup or drops of medicine to water on Erev Shabbos to be drunk on Shabbos? If the colored water could resemble a drink that healthy people would consume, then it is not apparent that *refuah* is being performed, and the solution is viable. If the discolored water does not look like a regular drink, then it is prohibited.

ארחות שבת פ"כ הערה קצ"ב



Day 29

Prior to taking any medicine or undergoing any medical procedure, one recites -

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלוקי ואלוקי אבותי שיהא עסק זה לי לרפואה, כי רופא חנם אתה.

It should be your will Hashem that this undertaking should provide healing, for You are the one who heals gratuitously. Following the consumption of the medication, one says *Blessed be the One Who heals - ברוך רופא חולים - gratuitously.* On Shabbos, this tefillah may be recited. Some have the practice not to recite any personal requests on Shabbos.

מ"ב ס' רל סק"ו, שו"ת בצל החכמה ח"ה ס' מא



Day 30

The prohibition of *refuah* on Shabbos applies to *refuah* being done to heal people, not animals. Thus, one may give medication to animals on Shabbos. Any *refuah* that involves doing something that is prohibited on Shabbos may not be done on Shabbos.

ח"ב ס' שלב סק"ו



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Mazel Tov
on completing a month
of Halacha Yomi!