INTRODUCTION

The British Medical Association New Guide to Medicines and Drugs has been planned and written to provide clear information and practical advice on drugs and medicines in a way that can be readily understood by a non-medical reader. The text reflects current medical knowledge and standard medical practice in this country. It is intended to complement and reinforce the advice given by your doctor, pharmacist, or other prescriber.

How the book is structured

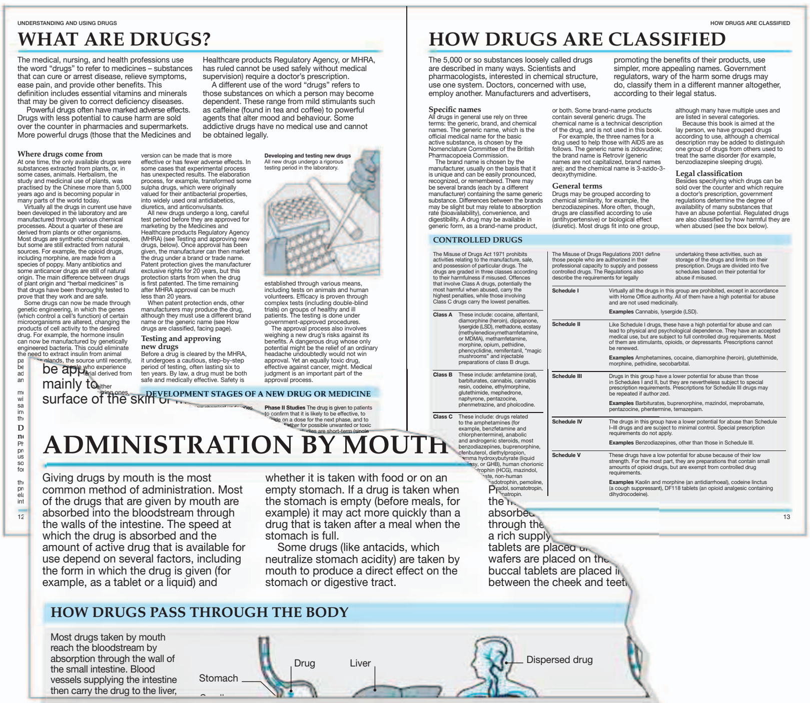
The book is divided into four parts. The first part, Understanding and Using Drugs, provides a general introduction to the effects of drugs and gives advice on practical questions, such as administration and storage of drugs. Part 2, Major Drug Groups, will help you to understand the uses and mechanisms of action of the principal classes of drugs. Part 3, the A–Z of Drugs, consists of 278 detailed profiles of commonly prescribed generic drugs, profiles of vitamins, minerals, and drugs of abuse, and information on complementary and alternative medicines, drugs in sport, and medicines and travel. Part 4 contains useful resources, a glossary of drug-related terms, the drug finder, which helps locate information on specific drugs through an index to over 2,500 generic and brand-name drugs, and a general index.

Finding your way into the book

The information you require, whether on the specific characteristics of an individual drug or on the general effects and uses of a group of drugs, can be easily obtained without prior knowledge of the medical names of drugs or drug classification through one of the two indexes: the drug finder or the general index. The diagram on the facing page shows how you can obtain information throughout the book on the subject concerning you from each of these starting points.

1 UNDERSTANDING AND USING DRUGS

The introductory part of the book, Understanding and Using Drugs, gives a grounding in the fundamental principles underlying the medical use of drugs. Covering such topics as classifications of drugs, mechanisms of action, and the proper use of medicines, it provides valuable background information that backs up the more detailed descriptions and advice given in Parts 2 and 3. You should read this section before seeking further specific information.



2 MAJOR DRUG GROUPS

Subdivided into sections dealing with each body system (for example, heart and circulation) or major disease grouping (for example, malignant and immune disease), this part of the book contains descriptions of the principal classes of drugs. Information is given on the uses, actions, effects, and risks associated with each group of drugs and is backed up by helpful illustrations and diagrams. Individual drugs in each group are listed to allow cross-reference to Part 3.