

Medications That Should Not Be Used in Children or Elderly Adults

If you are choosing OTC medications for a child, an elderly family member, or other person in your care, ask your pharmacist if you need to be aware of any medication issues based on the person's age or weight. Some OTC medications should not be used or have special dosing instructions for use in children or elderly adults. For example, aspirin or other products with salicylate as an ingredient should not be used in children ages 18 years or younger if they have fever, flu or flu-like symptoms, viral infections, or colds because of the increased risk of developing Reye's syndrome. Most cough and cold medications should not be used in children under 6 years of age without a physician's approval or prescription. Likewise, many medications must be used very carefully in older adults, including some OTC antihistamines and anti-inflammatory medications.

Dosing Medications Correctly

When using an OTC product, it is important to precisely follow the dosing directions on the medication label or the instructions given to you by a health care professional. In addition, when a product includes a dosing device in the package (such as an oral syringe or small measuring cup), the medication should always be measured using that device. Never use a kitchen spoon to measure doses of liquid products to avoid giving too much or too little medication.

In recent years, several OTC medications have had formula changes to help lower the risk of accidental overdoses (for example, infant's acetaminophen). To further reduce accidental overdoses, the FDA now has manufacturers of certain liquid OTC products include a dosing device with visible markings specific to the product's dosage instructions.

Using Medications Safely

Each time you buy or use an OTC medication, carefully read the package and label. Tell your pharma-

cist about all of the medications you take, including prescription drugs, OTC products, vitamins, minerals, and herbal supplements. Use a personal medication record to write down your medications, and keep an up-to-date list of your vaccinations and health concerns. Be sure to share this information with your pharmacist, physician, and other health care providers at every visit. Before taking any new medication, talk with your pharmacist or physician about the medication, including its purpose, benefits, side effects, and any possible drug interactions.

Your pharmacist can help you select the right OTC medications for you and your loved ones. Ask your pharmacist these six questions before taking any new OTC medication:

- What OTC medications are available for my symptoms?
- How much of this medication should I take at a time?
- How often should I take this product and for how long?
- What medications, herbal supplements, foods, beverages, or activities should I avoid while taking this OTC product?
- Does this product interact with any other medications I am taking?
- Is there anything else about this OTC product I should know before taking it or giving it to my loved one?

Know Your Pharmacist, Know Your Medicine

Choose your pharmacist as carefully as you choose your doctor. Your pharmacist is an important member of your health care team. Using just one pharmacy and getting to know the pharmacists on a first-name basis can benefit your health. That way, your complete medication record will be kept in a single place and your pharmacists will become familiar with you and your medical history. Your pharmacist can help you select appropriate OTC products, avoid common problems when using medication, and recognize when your condition needs more than self-care and refer you for treatment by a physician.

Choosing the Right Over-the-Counter Treatment for You and Your Loved Ones



Using Medications Wisely to Feel Better Soon

Every day, millions of Americans use over-the-counter medications (also called OTC or nonprescription products) for relief from headaches, arthritis, coughs and colds, flu, upset stomach, and a variety of other conditions. Even though OTC products are widely available, easy to use, and provide value for your health care dollars, it is important to know that these medications do have risks if used incorrectly.

Your pharmacist is a medication expert with years of advanced training about how all medications—both prescription and OTC—can work to improve your health. Pharmacists know which OTC medications will help you get better and the possible dangers of the medications you take. They also can help you learn how to use your medications correctly. Your pharmacist can help you select an OTC product to best treat your symptoms and knows when you should see a physician instead of trying to self-treat a problem with your health.

Over-the-Counter Products Are Serious Medicine

Many of the OTC medications that you can buy today were once available only by prescription. Now that you can get these medications on your own in the pharmacy, supermarket, or corner convenience store, it is important to take your part seriously and read the instructions carefully to avoid medication problems.

Certain people might experience a side effect after taking a medication, while others may have a different reaction or no trouble at all. You should make sure to report any concerns or changes in your health to your pharmacist or physician. A few common problems that could happen when people use OTC medications include:

- Experiencing drug interactions
- Taking prescription or other OTC products with duplicate ingredients at the same time
- Using the wrong medication or an incorrect dosage for children or elderly adults
- Not using the measuring device that came with the medicine
- Using too much or too little medicine

What Are Drug Interactions?

Drug interactions are unwanted results that may occur when taking a medication along with other medicinal products, with some foods, or when a person has certain health conditions. There are three main kinds of drug interactions: drug-drug interactions, drug-food interactions, and drug-disease interactions.

Drug-drug interactions happen when a drug interacts, or interferes, with another drug. This changes the way one or both drugs act in the body and can cause unexpected or unwanted side effects. The drugs involved can be prescription medications, OTC products, vitamins, minerals, or herbal supplements.

Sometimes, when two medications interact, the effect of one or both drugs may increase and the overall result may be more than desired. For example, both aspirin and blood thinners (such as warfarin) help to prevent blood clots from forming, but using these medications together may cause unwanted bleeding.

Other times, two medications may interact and cause less action than desired. For example, certain antacids prevent many medications (such as antibiotics, blood thinners, and heart medications) from being absorbed into the bloodstream. As a result, these important life-saving medications may not work as well or at all.

Drug-food interactions happen when something you eat or drink interferes with the prescription medication, OTC product, vitamin, or herbal supplement you take. For example, eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice while taking certain medications may increase levels of these medications in your body.

Drug-disease interactions happen when a prescription medication, OTC product, vitamin, or herbal supplement taken to help one health condition makes another disease or condition worse. For example, some decongestants, which are found in many cold, allergy, and cough medications, may increase your blood pressure. This can be dangerous for people with high blood pressure or a heart condition.

Beware of Duplicate Ingredients

Many products—prescription medications, OTC medications, and herbal supplements—should not be used together because they may contain some of the same ingredients. Taking the same ingredient in multiple medications causes duplication, or an overlapping of medication, that can be harmful.

For example, severe pain is often treated with prescription medications that contain both an opioid drug and acetaminophen. A number of common OTC products also contain acetaminophen, such as cough and cold products as well as some medications for headache, arthritis, menstrual discomfort, and other types of pain. Combining these products—whether prescription medication plus OTC product together or OTC product plus OTC product—may lead to an acetaminophen overdose. Taking too much acetaminophen can cause serious liver problems and even death. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is working with the manufacturers of OTC products to clearly list dosing information on labels.