

# Poison Prevention Press

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## OTC Medicine Safety Online Resource

Scholastic, McNeil and the American Association of Poison Control Centers have updated their OTC medicine safety program.

[www.scholastic.com/otcmedsafety/](http://www.scholastic.com/otcmedsafety/)

This is a great resource for teachers, nurses, families and communities. It provides tools to promote OTC medicine safety in older elementary and middle school students. And it is free!

Children will learn about:

- OTC medicines
- the drug facts label
- medicine measuring tools
- medicine misuse

It also includes a digital story book and an interactive online activity.

## Did you know that...

- Kids are starting to self-medicate as early as 11 years old
- OTC medicine errors and misuse result in over 10,000 visits to hospital emergency rooms for kids younger than 18 each year.



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## OTC Medicine Safety

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines allow us to treat minor medical problems without seeing a doctor. They can treat allergies and colds, headaches, skin rashes, and stomach problems. Prescription medicines are only available when ordered by a doctor. While, OTC medicines may have the same or similar ingredients as prescription medicine, the dose is usually lower. This does not mean that OTC medicines are safer than prescription medicines. All medicines can cause harm if they are not used properly. Follow the tips below to prevent mishaps with OTC medicines.

Read the label every time the medicine is used. It is important to read the label to make sure you are using the medicine for the proper reason. Ingredients, dosage, interactions and storage information are also found on the label.

Follow the directions exactly. When dosing instructions are followed, OTC medicines are safe and effective. When dosing instructions are not followed, side effects can occur. Taking more medicine than recommended will not make you get better faster.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before using an OTC medicine if you are taking one or more prescription medicines. Some ingredients in OTC medicines are the same as prescription medicines. Using both at the same time can cause serious harm. Some ingredients in OTC medicines can interact with prescription medicines. This could lead to side effects or the medicines not working as they should.

Review ingredients to make sure you are not taking two medicines with the same ingredient. For example, many cold medicines contain a pain reliever. If you have recently taken a medicine for a headache, taking the cold medicine could mean you have taken too much pain reliever. Reviewing the ingredients will ensure you don't take two medicines with the same ingredient. Check to make sure the ingredients in an OTC medicine are not similar to any prescription medicines you are taking.

For liquid medicines, use the dosing device that comes with the medicine. Kitchen spoons differ in size. They should not be used to give medicine because you can't be sure you are getting the proper dose. The directions for use should match the markings on the dosing device. Using a dosing device from another medicine could lead to giving the wrong dose.

Store medicines properly. Medicines should be put away after each use. If left out on a counter a child could get into the medicine. Medicines should be stored up and away and out of sight of young children. If possible, keep medicines in a locked cabinet.

Make sure safety caps are locked after using the medicine. Safety caps are child-resistant, not child-proof. They make it more difficult for a child to get into the medicine. But they only work if they are put on tightly after use. And if left alone for a long enough time, some children will be able to open a safety cap. Proper use of safety caps and proper storage will decrease the chances of young children getting into medicine.

If an OTC medicine does not have dosing for children on the label, do not use it for a child unless directed by your pediatrician. Children are not small adults. They do not react to medicines the same way adults do. Even small doses of adult medicines may be harmful to children.

Remember, help with OTC and prescription medicine is available anytime, day or night by calling your local poison center at 1-800-222-1222. You will speak right away with a pharmacist or nurse. Your call is confidential, fast and at no cost to you.