

PoisonPreventionPress

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Additional Tips for Using OTC Medicines Safely

In addition to always following the Drug Facts Label, follow these simple tips to use OTC medicines safely.

- 1. Do not use expired medicines.** Expired medicines can be less effective or pose health risks. Dispose of all medicines safely.
- 2. Talk with tweens and teens about medicine safety.** As children get older, they may begin managing their own medicines which may lead to mistakes or misuse. Having regular conversations about safe medicine use can help them make responsible choices.
- 3. Save the Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222, in your phone.**

Did you know that...

- the availability of OTC medicines save \$51.6 billion in drug costs?
- acetaminophen is found in more than 600 prescription and OTC medicines?

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Over-the-Counter Medicines

Chances are you have used an over-the-counter (OTC) medicine to treat a headache, relieve allergy symptoms, or manage a cold. OTC medicines are available without a prescription from a health care provider, making them a convenient option for treating common health conditions.

Types of OTC Medicines

There are hundreds of OTC medicines available, but most fall into a few common categories. It is best practice to talk with your health care provider or pharmacist before starting a new OTC medicine.

- Pain relievers (Advil®, Tylenol®, aspirin)
- Allergy medicines (Zyrtec®, Claritin®, Benadryl®)
- Cold and flu medicines (Sudafed®, Robitussin®)
- Digestive medicines (Tums®, MiraLAX®, Dramamine®)
- Sleep aids (Benadryl®, Nytol®, Unisom®)
- Cough remedies
- Vitamins and supplements
- Topical treatments

There are also several combination OTC products such as Dayquil®, Theraflu®, and Tylenol Cold and Flu Multi-Symptom®, that help relieve more than one symptom.

Drug Facts Label

Every OTC medicine has a Drug Facts Label, which is required by the U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA). You'll find it on the outside package or, if there is no outer packaging, on the medicine container itself. The label is designed to give you the information you need to use the medicine safely. Before taking any OTC medicine, take a few minutes to read the entire Drug Facts Label, even if you have used it before. Two important sections of the label to pay close attention to include:

- Active Ingredient(s)-** This section lists the active ingredient(s) and the amount of it in each dose. For topical products that do not have a standard dosage unit, the amount of each active ingredient(s) may be stated as a percentage of the product. Many OTC medicines may contain the same active ingredients as other OTC medicines you may be taking. Taking two products with the same active ingredients can lead to unwanted symptoms or an overdose.
- Warnings-** Always read the Warnings section before using an OTC medicine. It may include information about who should not use the product, possible drug interactions or side effects, when to stop using the medicine and seek medical care, and more. Some OTC medicines are not safe for people with certain medical conditions or for those taking certain prescription medicines. If you take prescription medicines or have ongoing health conditions, ask your health care provider or pharmacist before using an OTC medicine.

Dosing

Instructions on how much medicine to take or use are found on the medicine's Drug Facts Label and should always be followed as instructed. If a medicine comes with a dosing device such as a measuring cup or oral syringe, always use it. Never use a kitchen spoon, a dosing device from another medicine, or estimate the amount. Taking more medicine than directed will not help you feel better faster. In fact, taking too much medicine can be dangerous. Always read the label carefully and take only the recommended dose.

If an OTC medicine does not have dosing for children on the label, do not use it for a child unless directed by their pediatrician. Children do not react to medicine the same way adults do, and even a small dose of an adult medicine may be harmful to children. When giving a child medicine, keep track of the dose and what time it was given to help you and other caregivers avoid giving a double dose or skipping a dose.

Safe Storage

It's important to store all medicines, including OTC medicines, safely to ensure they are used in the right way, right amount, and by the right person. Medicine should be stored up, away, and out of sight of children, pets, and visitors to prevent them from getting into it. Some teens and visitors might also seek medicines in your home for improper use. Safe storage can help prevent this. When closing medicine containers, make sure safety caps are tightly closed. Child-resistant caps can help keep young kids out of medicines, but these caps are not child-proof.

If you or someone you know has questions or needs help with an OTC medicine, call the Maryland Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222. We provide free, confidential advice 24/7.