

## Medicines In My Home: Know Your Medicines for Colds, Fever, and Pain



Winter is here and its a season filled with holidays, snow, school vacation (yippee!)... and winter cold and flu season. Many people will have sniffing, sneezing, coughing, or fever during the winter months. Some may use one or more over-the-counter medicines to treat those problems. How much do you know about medicines for cold, fever, and pain?

### What's In a Name? ... Not a lot.

The name of a medicine may not tell you what the medicine treats or if it's right for you and your problem. Companies that make medicines often sell a whole group of them under the same brand name. The same brand name may be used for a medicine for fever, for pain, for a cold, for a cold and cough, and for allergies. And, if you aren't careful, you may use the wrong one.

### How do you choose the correct medicine for your problem?

Read the **Drug Facts** label on the medicine package. The Drug Facts label can help you pick a medicine that's right for you and your problem.

The **Drug Facts** label tells you:

- The **active ingredients** (the parts that make it work)
- What the medicine does (**purpose**)
- **Problems the medicine treats (uses)**
- **Warnings** - who should not use the medicine, who should ask a doctor or pharmacist before using the medicine, reasons to stop using the medicine, and ways to avoid harm
- How to use the medicine safely (**directions**)

### What if you need to treat more than one problem?

Choose a medicine that treats only the problems you have. Some over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are made to treat more than one problem and have more than one active ingredient. Examples of these medicines are:

<b>Drug Facts</b>	
<b>Active ingredient (in each tablet)</b> Chlorpheniramine maleate 2 mg	<b>Purpose</b> Antihistamine
<b>Uses</b> temporarily relieves those symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergies: ■ sneezing ■ runny nose ■ itchy, watery eyes ■ itchy throat	
<b>Warnings</b> Ask a doctor before use if you have ■ glaucoma ■ a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis ■ trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking tranquilizers or sedatives	
<b>When using this product</b> ■ you may get drowsy ■ avoid alcoholic drinks ■ alcohol, sedatives, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness ■ be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery ■ excitability may occur, especially in children	
If pregnant or breast-feeding, ask a health professional before use. Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.	
<b>Directions</b>	
adults and children 12 years and over	take 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 12 tablets in 24 hours
children 6 years to under 12 years	take 1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 6 tablets in 24 hours
children under 6 years	ask a doctor
<b>Other information</b> ■ store at 20-25° C (68-77° F) ■ protect from excessive moisture	
<b>Inactive ingredients</b> D&C yellow no. 10, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, pregelatinized starch	

- Cold and flu medicines
- Some allergy medicines
- Cough and cold medicines

Since all medicines can cause unwanted side effects, it's important to choose a medicine that treats only the problems you have. Don't choose a medicine that includes extra active ingredients for problems you don't have. For example, some over-the-counter medicines treat stuffy nose, sneezing, or cough and also include an ingredient to treat pain and fever. If you don't have pain or fever, you shouldn't pick a medicine that treats these problems.

### **Medicines for Fever and Pain: What You Should Know**

There are two kinds of over-the-counter medicines that treat pain and fever: acetaminophen and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). The NSAIDs include ibuprofen, naproxen, ketoprofen, and aspirin. Children and teenagers should not use aspirin for fever or flu, because it may cause Reye's syndrome, a severe illness that can affect the blood, liver, and brain. Medicine labels may list aspirin-like medicines by other names including: acetylsalicylic acid, acetyl salicylate, salicylic acid, or salicylate. Products that have aspirin or aspirin-like medicines have a warning on the box about Reye's syndrome.

Pain or fever medicines like acetaminophen or ibuprofen are often added to other active ingredients that treat cough, sinus congestion (stuffy nose), or allergies.

These medicines, if used only when needed and as directed on the label, are safe and effective. But using too much of them, using them too often, or for too long can be dangerous. For example:

- Taking more acetaminophen than directed on the label can cause serious liver damage. You may not know you've damaged your liver right away, because signs of liver damage often don't appear for many days.
- Taking more NSAID than directed can damage your kidneys and can cause stomach bleeding.

There are many OTC medicines that contain the same active ingredient. This is not always easy to see or understand from the name on the package. If you use a pain medicine for your headache and a cough-cold-fever medicine for your cold symptoms, you may be taking twice the recommended dose of acetaminophen or NSAID and not know it. This can happen with two over-the-counter medicines or with an over-the-counter medicine and a prescription pain medicine.

Acetaminophen and NSAIDs can be in prescription pain medicines and in prescription and over-the-counter medicines for colds and allergies. How can you make sure that you don't accidentally take too much of a medicine?

- Read the label

- Check the active ingredients in your medicines
- Don't use two medicines together if they have the same active ingredient.
- If you aren't sure which medicine to use or don't know the active ingredients in a prescription medicine, ask your pharmacist or healthcare professional.

Cut out and post these tips near your medicines to remind you to read the label each time.



Read the label each time before you use a medicine. Be sure it's right in 5 ways:

- the right medicine
- for the right person
- in the right amount
- at the right time
- in the right way (swallow, chew, apply to skin)

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