



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Food and Drug Administration

Adult
version



Medicines In My Home

Information for adults on using
over-the-counter medicines safely

www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome



More about using medicines safely

Medicines in My Home:
www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome

FDA Consumer Medicine Education:
www.fda.gov/usemedicinesafely

National Council on Patient Information and Education:
www.bemedwise.org

Medline Plus, NIH:
www.medlineplus.gov

Medline Plus, Over-the-Counter Medicines:
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/overthecountermedicines.html

Contact FDA: druginfo@fda.hhs.gov
1-888-INFO-FDA

Quick info

If someone uses too much medicine, call for help right away.

Doctor's phone number:

Pharmacy phone number:

24 hour Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222

What is over-the-counter medicine?

A medicine (drug) changes the way your body works or treats or prevents a disease.

An over-the-counter (OTC) medicine is the kind you buy without a doctor's order (prescription). Before you use any medicine, you should always read the label.

The *Drug Facts* label

In the United States, all OTC medicines have a *Drug Facts* label. The *Drug Facts* label is there to help you choose the right OTC medicine for you and your problem and to use it safely. All medicines, even OTC medicines, can cause side effects (unwanted or unexpected effects). But if you follow the directions on the label, you can lower your chance of side effects.

The *Drug Facts* label tells you:

- the ingredients in the medicine
- what the medicine is for
- if the medicine is right for you and your problem
- if there are reasons to talk to your doctor first
- how to use your medicine



On the last two pages of this booklet you can learn about the parts of the *Drug Facts* label and see a sample.

Here are some safety tips and medicine facts for you and your family....

Safer by the dozen Tips for using medicine safely

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist any time you have a question about a medicine.
2. Keep a record of what you use. Your record should include OTC and prescription medicines, vitamins, herbals, and other supplements you use. Give this list to your healthcare professionals so they can keep their records up-to-date and help you use medicine safely. (See "My Medicine Record" at www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome)
3. Before you start using something new, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. They can help you avoid medicines (and supplements) that don't mix well with each other.
4. Choose a medicine that treats only the problems you have. Extra medicine won't help you but could cause harmful or unwanted side effects.
5. Read the label each time before you use a medicine. No matter how well you think you know your medicine, check what it is, what it is for, and how to use it. Make sure you have enough light to see the label clearly.
6. Check the active ingredients in all medicines. These are the parts of the medicine that make it work. Don't use two medicines with the same active ingredient at the same time, because too much can hurt you.
7. Use the medicine dose listed on the label. Don't use more. If this dose doesn't help, talk to your doctor.



Tips for using medicines safely

- Use medicine only as long as the label says. If you think you need the medicine for a longer time, talk to your doctor.
- Keep medicine in the bottle, box or tube that it came in. That will make the directions easy to find.
- Keep medicine out of reach and sight of children and pets. A locked box, cabinet, or closet is best.
- Keep all medicines in a cool, dry place. This helps medicine last longer and work better.
- If a medicine is past the date on the package, it may not work as well. Your local government can help you find the safest way to throw away old medicines while keeping them away from children and pets.

About prescription medicine

Don't use other people's prescription medicine and don't share your prescription medicine with anyone else.

Use your prescription medicine only as directed. If you think you need a change in your medicine, talk to your doctor.

Make sure that your prescription medicines don't contain the same active ingredients as your OTC medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the active ingredients in prescription medicines.



How to measure liquid medicine

It is important to measure medicines correctly.

- Use the measuring spoon, cup, or syringe that comes with the medicine. It will give the most exact dose.
- If the medicine doesn't come with a special measuring tool, ask for one at the pharmacy. Spoons made for eating and cooking may hold the wrong amount of medicine.
- Check the markings to make sure your measuring tool can measure the right dose.

Most liquid medicines are measured in teaspoons (tsp) and milliliters (mL).

5 mL = 1 teaspoon (tsp)

15 mL = 3 teaspoons = 1 tablespoon (TBSP)

30 mL = 1 fluid ounce (oz)



Giving medicine to a child

- Use your child's weight to find the right dose of medicine on the *Drug Facts* label.
- If you don't know your child's weight, use his or her age to find the right dose.
- Never guess a dose. If a dose for your child's weight or age is not listed on the label or if you can't tell how much to use, ask your pharmacist or doctor what to do.

Problems OTC medicine can treat

Pain and fever are two of the most common reasons people use OTC medicines.

There are five active ingredients used to reduce fever and to treat mild aches and pains caused by headaches, muscle aches, backaches, toothaches, menstrual cramps, and the common cold:

- acetaminophen
- aspirin
- ibuprofen
- naproxen sodium
- ketoprofen



The last four active ingredients are all members of a drug family called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs (said EN-saids), for short.

OTC medicines can treat or prevent other health problems. Here are some examples:

- nasal congestion (decongestants)
- allergies (antihistamines)
- cough (cough suppressants and expectorants)
- stomach upset (antacids and acid reducers)
- cigarette addiction (nicotine gum, lozenge, or patch)
- skin damage from sun (sunscreens)

People with high blood pressure or heart disease need to talk to their doctor before using these decongestants to treat nasal congestion or a stuffy nose.



More about active ingredients

Active ingredients are safer when you follow directions.

The active ingredients in OTC medicines can be harmful if you don't use them as directed on the label. Take for example, the active ingredients in OTC fever and pain medicines....

- Acetaminophen can damage your liver, especially if you use more than directed.
- Ibuprofen, naproxen, or ketoprofen can damage your kidneys.
- Children and teenagers shouldn't use aspirin for fever or flu because it may cause a severe illness called Reye's Syndrome.



Medicines can have more than one active ingredient.

Medicines with more than one active ingredient are usually made to treat more than one problem. Here are some examples:

- cold and flu medicines
- some allergy medicines
- cough and cold medicines

Choose a medicine that treats only the problems you have. Medicine you don't need won't help you and could cause harmful or unwanted side effects.

Is it a medicine (drug)?

Type of product	Is it medicine?	Why?
Antiperspirant	Yes	Stops sweat glands from making sweat
Deodorant	No	Just covers up odor of sweat
Mouthwash for plaque and gum disease	Yes	Contains active ingredients that reduce plaque and gum disease
Regular mouthwash	No	Just makes breath smell better
Dandruff shampoo	Yes	Treats dandruff and itching
Regular shampoo	No	Just cleans hair
Fluoride toothpaste	Yes	Reduces cavities
Toothpaste without fluoride	No	Just cleans your teeth

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

1. the right medicine
2. for the right person
3. in the right amount
4. at the right time
5. in the right way (swallow, chew, apply to skin)



Are dietary supplements over-the-counter medicines?

Like over-the-counter medicines, dietary supplements can be bought off the shelf without a doctor's order (prescription). They can come as tablets, capsules, softgels, liquids, or powders, so they may also look a lot like medicine you take by mouth.

But dietary supplements aren't OTC medicines.

Dietary supplements are taken by mouth to add to the food you eat. Dietary supplements may contain vitamins, minerals, herbs, and other ingredients.

Dietary supplements have *Supplement Facts* labels. Over-the-counter medicines have *Drug Facts* labels.



You can read more about dietary supplements and their labels at: www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/ConsumerInformation/default.htm

The *Drug Facts* Label

The **Active ingredient/Purpose** section tells you about the part of your medicine that makes it work – its name, what it does, and how much is in each pill or teaspoon (5 mL).

The **Uses** section tells you the problems the medicine will treat.

The **Warnings** section tells you:

- when you should talk to your doctor first
- how the medicine might make you feel
- when you should stop using the medicine
- when you shouldn't use the medicine
- things you shouldn't do while using the medicine

Drug Facts	
Active ingredient (in each tablet)	Purpose
Chlorpheniramine maleate 4 mg.....	Antihistamine
Uses temporarily relieves these symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergies: ■ sneezing ■ runny nose ■ itchy, watery eyes ■ itchy throat	
Warnings 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	
When using this product ■ 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.	
Directions	
adults and children 12 years and over	take 1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 6 tablets in 24 hours
children 6 years to under 12 years	take 1/2 tablet every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 3 tablets in 24 hours
children under 6 years	ask a doctor
Other information ■ store at 20-25°C (68-77°F) ■ protect from excessive moisture	
Inactive ingredients D&C yellow no. 10, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, pregelatinized starch	

The **Warnings** section also tells you:

- to check with a doctor before using medicine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding
- to keep medicines away from children

The **Directions** section tells you how to safely use the medicine:

- how much to use
- how to use it
- how often to use it (how many times per day / how many hours apart)
- how long you can use it

The **Other Information** section tells you how to keep your medicine when you aren't using it.

The **Inactive Ingredients** section tells you any parts of the medicine that aren't active ingredients. Inactive ingredients help form a pill, add flavor or color, or help the medicine last longer.

