

## Choose Non-Prescription Medications Wisely

*Some people with an ailment head straight for their medicine cabinet for relief, while others look for ways to avoid having to take any medication at all.*

*With so many drug choices and alternative remedies on the market, it can be difficult to know when to take an over-the-counter (OTC) medication for mild pain, symptoms of illness or allergies, and other routine complaints.*

### Rx, OTC or Supplement?

Branded or generic pharmaceutical products require a prescription to be written for a specific individual who has been evaluated by a physician or other qualified health care professional. These products are heavily regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

OTC medications are widely available to consumers without having to see a prescriber or consult with a pharmacist. The FDA requires manufacturers to use a specific formula and approved labeling.

Herbal remedies (botanicals), minerals, probiotics, vitamins and similar products are regulated by the FDA as dietary supplements, not as drugs. Manufacturers must follow good manufacturing practices, but FDA approval is not required to sell supplements.

### Choosing Wisely

According to the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, a trade group, the majority of OTC medications sold in the U.S. fall into the following categories: allergies, analgesics, antifungal, cough, cold or flu, gastrointestinal (upper and lower), medicated skin solutions (e.g., first aid, anti-itch), sleep aids and smoking cessation.



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It's possible to experience side effects from non-prescription drugs. Adverse reactions can occur when they are combined with other medications or substances, including some foods and alcoholic beverages. Side effects associated with some non-prescription medications include nausea, dizziness, drowsiness or irritability. Signs of an allergic reaction include itching, hives and breathing problems.

Here are some tips to help ensure safe and effective use of OTC medications:

1. Follow directions; do not exceed recommended doses.
2. Review side effects and take necessary precautions (such as not driving).

3. Store in a secure place out of reach of children and pets.
4. Safely discard medication after its expiration date.

Check with your provider before taking an over-the-counter drug if:

- Your symptoms are difficult to manage
- You are not sure what is wrong with you
- You take prescription drugs for a chronic condition
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding

## Did You Know?

**A 2017 Consumer Reports survey found more than half of U.S. adults regularly take a prescription medication – four, on average – and that many people in that group also take over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and other dietary supplements. Americans outpace all other nationalities for the most medications consumed per year.**

## OTC Medication Common Uses

<b>Allergies</b>	<b>Headache, Arthritis, Strains and Sprains</b>
Antihistamine pills or liquids help relieve allergy symptoms	Acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain
Antihistamines that may cause sleepiness include Diphenhydramine (Benadryl); chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton); brompheniramine (Dimetapp); clemastine (Tavist)	Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen and naproxen for pain and inflammation
Antihistamines that cause little or no sleepiness include Loratadine (Alavert, Claritin, Dimetapp ND); fexofenadine (Allegra); cetirizine (Zyrtec)	<b>Runny Nose and Post-Nasal Drip<sup>1</sup></b>
Eye drops to soothe or moisten the eyes	Oral decongestant: Pseudoephedrine ( Contac Non-Drowsy, Sudafed and store brands); phenylephrine (Sudafed PE and store brands)
Preventive nasal spray: Cromolyn sodium (Nasalcrom), fluticasone (Flonase)	Nasal spray: Oxymetazoline (Afrin, Neo-Synephrine Nighttime, Sinex Spray); phenylephrine (Neo-Synephrine, Sinex Capsules)
<b>Cold, Sore Throat, Cough</b>	<b>Diarrhea</b>
General OTC cold medicines help reduce symptoms but do not shorten the duration of illness	Anti-diarrhea medicines such as loperamide (Imodium) slow down action of the intestine and reduce number of bowel movements; get medical advice if you suspect infection
Zinc supplements taken within 24 hours of the start of a cold may help reduce symptoms and duration of a cold	Medicines with bismuth (Kaopectate, Pepto-Bismol)
Guaifenesin helps break up mucus; drink fluids	Rehydration fluids (Analytes or Pedialyte)
Numbing sprays such as Dyclonine (Cepacol) and phenol (Chloraseptic)	<b>Nausea, Vomiting and Motion Sickness</b>
Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve)	Liquids or pills (Emetrol; Pepto-Bismol)
Throat lozenges	Rehydration fluids
Liquid suppressant (with dextromethorphan)	Motion sickness: Dimenhydrinate (Dramamine); meclizine (Bonine, Antivert, Postafen, Sea Legs)
<b>Fever</b>	<b>Skin Irritation, Rashes, Fungus</b>
Acetaminophen, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or aspirin	Oral antihistamines for itching or allergies
	Hydrocortisone cream (Cortaid, Cortizone 10)
	Antifungal creams and ointments (nystatin, miconazole, clotrimazole, ketoconazole)

Source: National Institutes of Health

<sup>1</sup> Decongestant nasal sprays may have a rebound effect; after three to five days of use symptoms may get worse. Before using a decongestant, check with your provider if you have high blood pressure or prostate problems.