

LEARN LABEL-ESE

MEDICINE CABINET (NOUN):
the go-to spot in your house containing a variety of over-the-counter elixirs for headaches, aches and pains, fevers, coughs, allergies, and runny noses. (And, if you're lucky enough to find any remaining space, possibly BAND-AID®, Q-tips®, or tweezers!)

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are those you buy without a prescription from your doctor. These medications can help you feel better by treating or preventing health problems, including constipation, cold and flu, and nausea. As with any medication, relief is sometimes accompanied by unpleasant effects, also known as adverse effects. These adverse effects include side effects, food and drug interactions, drug-drug interactions, and allergic reactions.

Before you take any OTC medicine, or any medication at all, take a moment to weigh the potential benefits and risks first. For example, pain relievers have been in our lives for so long that we depend on them without stopping to think about their differences and possible side effects.

While some OTC medications are for allergies, it is possible to be allergic to the actual OTC medicine. Many of these drugs contain similar active ingredients, so if you find yourself with symptoms such as hives, trouble breathing, or throwing up, go to the emergency room immediately!

READING THE LABEL

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) require all OTC medications to have a Drug Facts label. The OTC labeling rule applies to more than 100,000 OTC drug products. This label provides basic information about a medication's ingredients, instructions for use, and important safety cautions and interactions. This information helps you to select the correct medication and use it properly and safely.

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The Drug Facts label is only required for OTC drugs, and it is not used for dietary supplements, such as vitamins, minerals, and herbal remedies. It's important to realize if a drug has an active ingredient, it can have side effects and interfere with normal body functions. Did you know that ginkgo biloba and garlic supplements can put you at risk for increased bleeding? Many people also don't realize the herbal drug Saint-John's-wort, used by some to self-treat depression, can decrease the effectiveness of oral contraceptives.

Remember, just because you buy these medicines in the store doesn't mean they don't have the potential to be dangerous. Be vigilant about reading labels, storing out of the reach of kids and pets, and never exceeding the recommended daily doses or length of use, especially if you have a medical condition or you're on other drugs. If you have any questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist ... he or she will be more than happy to help!

Here's a list of some of the most commonly used OTC medicines and the adverse effects you may experience:

Acetaminophen (TYLENOL®)

Use: Best for headaches, fever, pain, minor sprains and aches; lasts for 4 to 6 hours.

Side effects: Consult your doctor or pharmacist first if you have a pre-existing liver condition or drink alcohol regularly.

Caution: Easy to inadvertently exceed recommended dosage by taking two or more medicines that contain acetaminophen (such as Tylenol Plus, Nyquil, Benadryl Allergy/Cold, or prescriptions like Vicodin® or Percocet®).

Ibuprofen (Advil®, MOTRIN®)

Use: A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), best for menstrual cramps, fever, headaches, sprains, and swelling and joint pain linked to osteoarthritis. Effects last for 4 to 6 hours.

Side effects: Can cause gas, bloating, stomach pain, heartburn, dizziness, and constipation. Prolonged use can cause ulcers, elevated blood pressure, kidney and liver damage, and in rare cases, stroke or heart attack.

Caution: If you have pre-existing heart or kidney disease, hypertension, diabetes, ulcers, or bleeding problems, and/or take diuretics, consult your doctor or pharmacist.

Diphenhydramine (BENADRYL®)

Use: Antihistamine used to prevent/reduce hay fever and other allergy symptoms.

Caution: Drowsiness, dryness of the eyes, mouth or nose, and memory loss and disorientation may occur, especially in the elderly.

Loratadine (Claritin®)

Use: Antihistamine used to relieve hay fever and other allergy symptoms.

Caution: May cause sleepiness, fast heart rate. May lose effectiveness over time. Claritin-D includes an additional active ingredient, pseudoephedrine sulfate, which may cause insomnia or restlessness.

Dextromethorphan (NyQuil® Cough)

Use: cough suppressant

Caution: Can cause drowsiness, especially

when mixed with sleeping medications and alcohol.

Ranitidine (Zantac®)

Use: Acid reducer, treats ulcers and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Caution: Long-term acid suppressor use can lead to poor absorption of some forms of calcium. May lose effectiveness over time.

Aspirin (Bayer®, St. Joseph, Bufferin®, Ecotrin®)

Use: Best for fever, pain, and inflammation. Evidence shows taking low doses (80 mg) daily can help to prevent heart attack and stroke.

Side effects: May cause stomach pain, heartburn, dizziness, and constipation. Prolonged use can cause ulcers, kidney and liver damage.

Caution: If you have diabetes, a bleeding disorder such as hemophilia, or pre-existing liver or stomach conditions, or if you are taking corticosteroids (such as prednisone) or blood pressure medication, consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking this drug.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Men and women have variations in every organ of the body, and because of that, they metabolize drugs differently. Gender-specific patterns of drug metabolism are due to the different ways males and females secrete growth hormone. The pattern in males, established by testosterone, consists of bursts of growth hormone alternating with periods of low hormone production. Females, by contrast, produce growth hormone at a constant rate.

For example, a woman's liver takes longer to process acetaminophen (Tylenol), increasing her risk for liver damage or overdose. Women should restrict their intake to four 325-milligram tablets or fewer a day.

Package inserts for drugs list differences in pharmacokinetics (the body's reaction to drugs), including pediatric, geriatric, and gender-specific differences. This section of the insert should be read carefully. Often times, there will be major differences in some of the drug's parameters, and a gender-related dosage adjustment may be required.

Naproxen (Aleve®)

Use: Best for pain, fever, inflammation, joint pain linked to osteoarthritis, and preventing mouth pain if taken before dental work. Lasts for 8 to 12 hours, good drug for all day relief.

Side effects: May cause stomach pain, heartburn, dizziness, and constipation. Prolonged use may cause ulcers, elevated blood pressure, kidney and liver damage, and, in rare cases, heart attack and stroke.

Aleve has same side effects as Advil or Motrin (see above: ibuprofen).

Caution: Take with food to lower risk of gastrointestinal problems, but not with milk, which increases acid production in the stomach and can worsen stomach irritation.

Sources:

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