



OTC Drugs

Over-the-counter drugs are often used to help alleviate symptoms associated with colds, flu, and other illnesses. This brochure contains a list of commonly used medications and their functions. Before taking any over-the-counter products the following tips are advised: read the package insert, take product as directed, and contact a pharmacist or health care provider with any questions.

Pain Relievers

Reduce general achiness, headache, and fever.

- Acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) is a painkiller and fever reducer. Does not irritate the stomach. Safe for people allergic to aspirin. Do not exceed 3000mg a day.
- Aspirin is a painkiller, fever reducer, and anti-inflammatory with few side effects. May cause stomach irritation so take with food. Not recommended for those under age 19 due to association with Reye's syndrome.*
- Ibuprofen (e.g., Advil, Motrin) is a painkiller, fever reducer, and anti-inflammatory. May irritate stomach so take with food.
- Naproxen Sodium (e.g., Aleve) is a painkiller, fever reducer, and anti-inflammatory. Pain relief lasts 8-12 hours, about twice as long as other painkillers. May irritate stomach so take with food.

Antihistamines

Dry the mucus membranes and help ease a runny nose (e.g., Benadryl, Allegra, Zyrtec, Claritin).

- May cause dryness in the nose and mouth.
- May cause drowsiness. (primarily Benadryl)
- Should not be used while driving or operating machinery.

Nasal Spray

- Reduce the size of swollen nasal membranes, making breathing easier (e.g., pseudoephedrine, phenylephrine, oxymetazoline)
- May act as a stimulant in some people.
- Most effective when taken orally, but also available as nose drops or nose sprays.
- Should be used with caution by people with high blood pressure
- Should not be used while driving or operating machinery.

What are OTC medications?

How do I know what kind of OTC medication I should take?

- Nasal drops/sprays should not be used for more than 2-3 consecutive days as they may actually increase congestion ("rebound effect").
- Must be 18 years or older to buy most products containing pseudoephedrine. These products are located behind the counter in the pharmacy.

Cough Expectorants

Help loosen phlegm and mucus (e.g., products containing guaifenesin such as Mucinex).

- May help make coughs more productive.
- Used for "wet" coughs.

Cough Suppressants

Reduce sensitivity to the cough reflex resulting in less coughing (e.g., products containing dextromethorphan).

- Good for coughs that prevent sleeping.
- Used for dry, tickly coughs.

Lozenges and Throat Sprays

Provide temporary relief of sore throat pain (e.g., Chloraseptic, Cepastat, Halls).

- Lozenges should be dissolved slowly in the mouth, not chewed.
- Continuous use may cause nausea.

Lozenges and Throat Sprays

- Avoid all-in-one products; it is best to use a medicine targeting a specific symptom.
- Read all warning labels and be sure to use products as directed.
- Be aware of the drug's side effects before taking it.
- Use caution when combining medications; contact a health care provider or pharmacist for advice or instructions if in doubt.
- Generic drugs are just as effective as brand name drugs and are available at a fraction of the cost.
- Contact a health care provider if symptoms do not subside.