

Over-the-counter (OTC) Pain Medicines

Making the Right Choice for You

Over-the-counter (OTC) pain medicines are easy to buy but can cause harm when not taken as directed. Use this handout as a way to help you choose and use these medicines safely.



There are only two types of OTC pain relievers: acetaminophen and NSAIDs (aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen sodium). They treat the same symptoms but they work differently. Read & follow the Drug Facts label to help you choose the right one for you.

Know the Active Ingredient



Acetaminophen is in more than **500** OTC and prescription medicines

NSAIDs* are in more than **900** OTC and prescription medicines



including cough, cold, flu, allergy and sleep medicines.

Take only one medicine with acetaminophen or an NSAID at a time.

*nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs



Check Before Buying Acetaminophen or an NSAID
You may not be able to take if you:

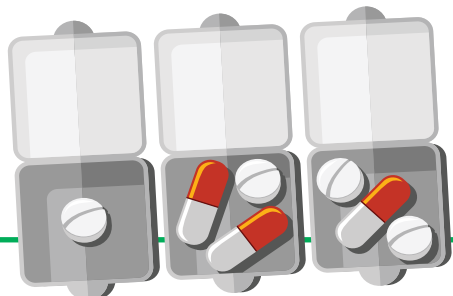
Acetaminophen

- Have liver disease
- Take certain medicines (e.g., the blood thinner warfarin)
- Drink 3 or more alcoholic beverages daily
- Have a medication allergy

NSAIDs

- Have history of stomach problems (heartburn, ulcers, bleeding)
- Have kidney or liver disease
- Have heart disease or high blood pressure
- Have asthma
- Take certain medicines (e.g., blood thinners, aspirin, diuretics, steroids)
- Drink 3 or more alcoholic beverages daily
- Are 60 years or older
- Have a medication allergy

If you have any questions, talk to your healthcare professional.





Read the label carefully

Drug Facts

Active Ingredient – What's in the medicine

Uses – What the medicine will treat

Warnings – Safety information and instructions

Directions – How much to take and for how long, how to take it and how often based on age

MAXIMUM DAILY DOSAGE

Acetaminophen
4,000 mg

Aspirin
4,000 mg

Ibuprofen
1,200 mg

Naproxen Sodium
660 mg

Dosages of OTC Products Vary

Two products with the same active ingredient can have different amounts of the ingredient in a single pill.

The maximum number of pills per day and how often to take them can be different for products from the same brand.

Taking more than the recommended dose will not alleviate pain faster.

Source: Adapted from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) "Over-The-Counter Medicine: What's Right for You?"

Know the Risks



ALL NSAIDS

May cause severe stomach bleeding.



ACETAMINOPHEN

Severe liver damage may occur when taken more than directed.



IBUPROFEN AND NAPROXEN SODIUM

May increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Source: Food and Drug Administration

Important Safety Tips

1 Always read and follow the Drug Facts label.

2 Use the lowest effective dose or strength for the shortest time.

3 Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions about choosing the appropriate OTC pain medicine.



If you think you took more than the maximum daily dosage, call the Poison Control helpline at 800-222-1222 even if you don't feel sick.

