

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 **600** OTC and prescription medicines

including cough, cold, flu, allergy and sleep medicines.
Ask your doctor before taking both at the same time.

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



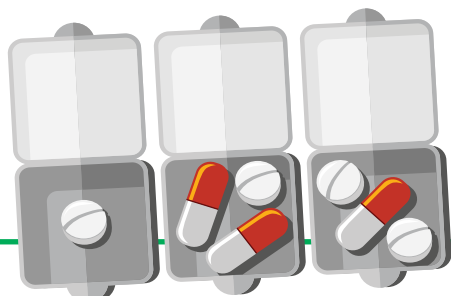
*nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs



Before Buying Acetaminophen or an NSAID
Ask your doctor if it's safe to take if you:

Acetaminophen

- Have liver disease
- Take certain medicines (like the blood thinner warfarin)
- Drink 3 or more alcoholic beverages daily
- Are allergic to acetaminophen



NSAIDs

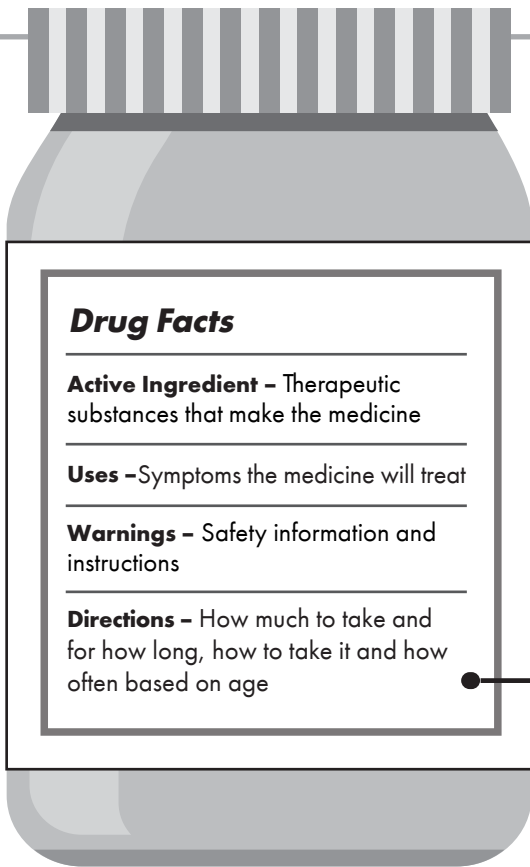
- Have history of stomach problems (heartburn, ulcers, bleeding)
- Have kidney or liver disease
- Have heart disease or high blood pressure
- Have asthma
- Take certain medicines (like blood thinners, aspirin, diuretics, steroids)
- Drink 3 or more alcoholic beverages daily
- Are 65 years or older
- Are in the third trimester of pregnancy

If you have any questions, talk to your health care professional.



Read the label carefully

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



Drug Facts

Active Ingredient – Therapeutic substances that make the medicine

Uses – Symptoms 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
600 mg

Dosages of OTC Products Vary

Two products with the same active ingredient can have different amounts of the ingredient.

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.

Know the Risks



ALL NSAIDS

May cause severe stomach bleeding.



ACETAMINOPHEN

Taking more than directed may result in severe liver damage.



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 possible.

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.

