

Using Over-the-Counter Medicines With Your Child

“Over-the-counter” (OTC) means you can buy the medicine without a doctor’s prescription. This *doesn’t* mean that OTCs are harmless. Like prescription medicines, OTCs can be dangerous if not taken the right way. Talk with your child’s doctor before giving your child any medicine, especially the first time.

All OTC medicines have the same kind of label. The label gives important information about the medicine. It says what it is for, how to use it, what is in it, and what to watch out for. Look on the box or bottle, where it says “Drug Facts.”

Ask the Doctor or Pharmacist

Check the chart on the label to see how much medicine to give. If you know your child’s weight, use that first. If not, go by age. **Check the label to make sure it is safe for infants and toddlers younger than 2 years.** If you are not sure, ask your child’s doctor.

Before you give your child any medicines, be sure you know how to use them. Here are some questions you can ask the doctor or **pharmacist***:

- How will this medicine help my child?
- Can you show me how to use this medicine?
- How much medicine do I give my child?
When? For how long?
- Are there any **side effects*** from this medicine?
- How can I learn more about this medicine?
- What if my child spits it out?
- Does it come in **chewable tablets*** or liquid?



Also, always tell your child’s doctor or pharmacist:

- If your child is taking *any* other medicines.
- If your child has any reactions to a medicine.

Call the Doctor Right Away If...

...your child throws up a lot or gets a rash after taking any medicine. Even if a medicine is safe, your child may be **allergic*** to it.

Your child *may or may not* have side effects with any drug. Be sure to tell the doctor if your child has any side effects with a medicine.

About Pain and Fever Medicines

Acetaminophen (uh-SET-tuh-MIN-uh-fin) and **ibuprofen** (eye-byoo-PROH-fin) help with fever and headaches or body aches. Tylenol is one brand name for acetaminophen. Advil and Motrin are brand names for ibuprofen.

These medicines also can help with pain from bumps, or soreness from a shot. Ask the doctor which one is best for your child.

* Words to Know

allergic (uh-LER-jik), **allergy** (AL-ur-gee)—to have a bad reaction to something that doesn’t bother most people. For example, some people may get hives if they are stung by a bee.

chewable tablet—a flavored pill that a child can chew instead of drinking liquid or swallowing an adult pill.

pharmacist (FARM-uh-sist)—a person who has special training to fill prescriptions and teach people about their medicines.

side effects—symptoms that come from taking a drug and are not part of the treatment. For example, some medicines may make you feel sick to your stomach.

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What Else You Need to Know

- Never give ibuprofen to a baby younger than 6 months.
- If your child has a kidney disease, asthma, an ulcer, or another chronic (long-term) illness, *ask the doctor before giving ibuprofen.*
- Don't give acetaminophen or ibuprofen at the same time as other OTC medicines, unless your child's doctor says it's OK.

A Warning About Aspirin

Never give aspirin to your child unless your child's doctor tells you it's safe. Aspirin can cause a very serious liver disease called Reye syndrome. This is especially true when given to children with the flu or chickenpox.

Ask your pharmacist about other medicines that may contain aspirin. Or, contact the National Reye's Syndrome Foundation at 1-800-233-7393 or www.reyessyndrome.org.



What to Do for Poisoning



**You can call the
Poison Center
in any state at
1-800-222-1222
at any time
of day or night.**

Call the Poison Center if you're not sure.

Sometimes parents find their child with something in his or her mouth or with an open bottle of medicine. The Poison Center can help you find out if this could hurt your child. Don't wait until your child is sick to call the Poison Center.

Call 911 or your local emergency number *right away* if your child:

- Is passed out and can't wake up, OR
- Is having a lot of trouble breathing, OR
- Is twitching or shaking out of control, OR
- Is acting very strange.

Don't use syrup of ipecac.

If you have syrup of ipecac in your home, flush it down the toilet and throw away the bottle. Years ago people used syrup of ipecac to make children throw up if they swallowed poison. Now we know that you should not make a child throw up.

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at www.aap.org.

Your child's doctor will tell you to do what's best for your child. This information should not take the place of talking with your child's doctor.

We hope the resources in this handout are helpful. The AAP is not responsible for the information in these resources. We try to keep the information up to date but it may change at any time.

Note: Brand names are for your information only. The AAP does not recommend any specific brand of drugs or products.

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