VitaMin

Vital health information in a minute

AN OVERVIEW ON OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINE

Eight of every 10 adults use over-the-counter (OTC) medicines for colds, coughs, and aches and pains.[1] Do you keep OTC medicines on hand for regular use? Do you also take vitamins and herbal supplements for your health? Being cautious and informed may help you avoid problems. Check with your doctor or pharmacist about your prescription medicines, OTC products and supplements.

Read those labels

Look for the following information on labels of medicines and supplements:

- Product name
- Active ingredients
- Purpose (type of product, such as antihistamine)
- Uses (symptoms treated)
- Warnings
- Directions (how much to take and for how long)
- Other information (such as proper storage)
- Inactive ingredients (such as binders, colors or flavoring)

Read the label each time you buy a product. If symptoms persist or worsen after you've taken the recommended dose for the suggested length of time, see a doctor.

Be careful with acetaminophen

Check your OTC and prescription labels for acetaminophen. Acetaminophen is a pain reliever and fever reducer found in Tylenol®. It may be one of your go-to medicines to keep on hand. However, taking too much can cause liver damage. Stay safe with these steps.

- Make sure that you're taking the right dose.
- Don't take two medicines containing acetaminophen at the same time.
- Avoid multi-ingredient cold and flu products that treat a number of symptoms.

Manage your medications wisely

Here are three steps you can take to help yourself or a loved one safely manage medicines.

1. **Talk with your doctor and pharmacist.** This is the best way to learn about your medicines and how to take them properly.
2. **Keep a checklist** of all your prescription and OTC medicines. It should include how much you take, when and whether to take them with food.
3. **Follow instructions exactly.** Pay attention to warnings about interactions with other drugs, supplements, foods or drinks.
4. **Ask your doctor for a yearly "medication checkup."** You should review what you're taking, including supplements and herbal products. Your doctor can help you adjust or stop medicines if needed.

Source:

1. The Center for Improving Medication Management & the National Council on Patient Information and Education, 2015. http://www.learnaboutrxsafety.org/healthy-dose.aspx (accessed June 5, 2015)

This is intended to be general health information and not medical advice or services. You should consult your doctor for medical advice or services, including seeking advice prior to undertaking a new diet or exercise program.

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