

PAIN RELIEF

Safe Use of Over-the-Counter Medications



Understanding Over-the-Counter Pain Relievers

Over-the-Counter (OTC) pain relievers are medicines you can buy without a prescription to treat common pain and discomfort. While they're generally safe when used correctly, it's important to understand which one to choose, how much to take, and when to see a doctor. Pain relievers can help you feel better when used the right way. Read labels, follow directions, and ask questions when you're not sure. When in doubt, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Common Types of Over-the-Counter Pain Relievers

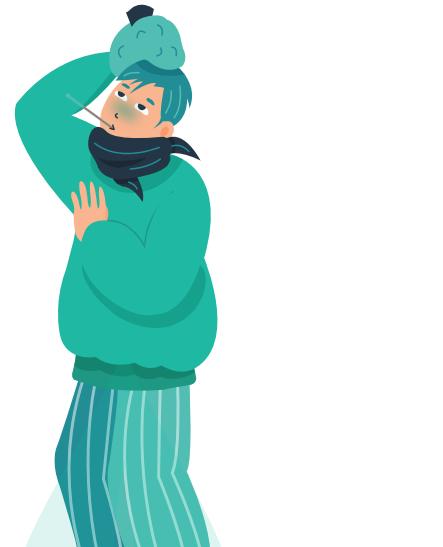
Acetaminophen (Tylenol®):

- Reduces pain and fever
- Gentle on the stomach
- Safe for most people when used correctly
- Do not exceed 3,000–4,000 mg per day (depending on the product) and be cautious—many cold and flu medicines also contain acetaminophen!



Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®):

- Reduces pain, inflammation, and fever
- Best for joint pain, muscle aches, and swelling
- Take with food to avoid stomach upset
- This medication is not recommended for people with kidney problems or certain stomach issues.



Naproxen (Aleve®):

- Similar to ibuprofen but longer-lasting
- Good for menstrual cramps, arthritis, and back pain
- Take with food or milk
- Use with caution in older adults and those with heart or kidney concerns

Aspirin:

- Used less commonly for pain now; mainly for heart health in some cases
- Never give aspirin to children or teens due to risk of Reye's syndrome



How to Use Pain Medications Safely

✓ Follow the Directions on the Label

- Use the right dose based on age and weight.
- Don't mix similar medicines (like two that contain acetaminophen or NSAIDs)

✓ Check for Other Medications

- Many multi-symptom cold, flu, or allergy meds contain pain relievers—don't double up!

✓ Know Your Health Conditions

- Talk to a doctor if you have kidney disease, liver disease, heart problems, ulcers, or are pregnant

✓ Use Measuring Tools for Liquid Medicines

- Use the dosing cup or syringe that comes with the medicine—not a kitchen spoon

When to Call a Doctor or Pharmacist

Get professional advice/support:

- If pain lasts more than a few days without improvement
- If you accidentally take too much
- If you develop stomach pain, black stools, rash, or unusual bleeding
- If you have other health conditions and aren't sure what's safe
- If you're giving medicine to a child or older adult.



FAQs

Some Common Questions about Safe Use of Over-the-Counter Medications

Q: Can I take ibuprofen and acetaminophen together?

A: Yes, sometimes doctors recommend alternating or combining them for stronger pain relief—but only take both under medical advice.

Q: What's the safest pain reliever if I have stomach issues?

A: Acetaminophen is usually safest for people with ulcers or acid reflux, but check with your doctor.

Q: Are OTC pain meds addictive?

A: OTC medications like acetaminophen and ibuprofen are not addictive when used as directed, but taking too much or too often can harm your liver, kidneys, or stomach.