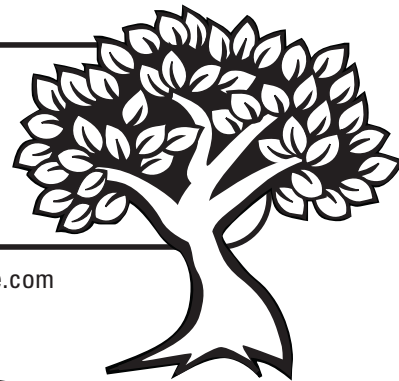




# Senior Series

A partnership between Ohio State University Extension  
and Ohio Aging Network professionals



For more information, visit the Ohio Department of Aging web site at: <http://www.goldenbuckeye.com>  
and Ohio State University Extension's "Aging in Ohio" web site at: <http://seniorseries.osu.edu>

## Over-the-Counter Medication Labels

Before taking any medication it is very important to read the label. Medication labels contain important information to help you take your medications the right way and prevent medication interactions and other medication-related problems. If you do not read a medication label, you may make mistakes in taking medications and cause serious health problems.

Labels for over-the-counter (OTC) medications have detailed information to assist in their proper use without the advice of a health care professional. However, over-the-counter medications are *not* without risks. The use of these medications is relatively safe only when the proper dosage is followed.

Reading labels carefully before buying an OTC medication is important, especially if you have a special health problem or are on a special diet. Some examples include:

- If you have high blood pressure or diabetes (high blood sugar), you should not take decongestants without talking to your doctor or pharmacist. By reading the label, or asking your pharmacist, you can find out if an OTC cold medicine is safe for you.
- If you have high blood pressure, or are on a low sodium or salt-free diet, you should avoid products containing sodium bicarbonate (a common antacid) or other forms of sodium. Labels provide ingredient information and may

indicate whether a medication is considered “salt-free” or low in sodium.

Before you purchase an OTC medication consider the following:

### **Medication Use**

- Is the medication meant to be used in the way you plan to use it?
- Will it help to relieve the symptoms that you have?

### **Ingredients**

- Is there anything in the product you should avoid?
- Are you allergic to any of the ingredients?
- Are you sensitive to any ingredients because of a chronic health problem?
- If you are on a low-salt diet, what is the sodium content?
- If you are on a low-sugar diet, what is the sugar content?

### **Warnings**

- What are the limits on taking this medication, if any?
- Who should not take the medication?
- Are you currently taking any other medications that may interact with this medication?

- Are there any foods or beverages you should avoid while taking the medication?
- When should you talk to your doctor or pharmacist about a medication?
- What symptoms are listed that serve as warnings to stop taking the medication?
- How long should you take the medication before calling your doctor?

### **Directions**

- What is the right dose?
- How often should this medication be taken?
- How should the medication be taken?

### **Cautions**

- Are there any activities to avoid while taking the medication (e.g., driving, drinking alcoholic beverages, or being exposed to sunlight). Can you follow these cautions?
- What should you do if you take too much of the medication?

### **Side Effects**

- What are possible side effects?

## Expiration Date

- When does the medication expire? (Be sure to discard, and do not take, any medicine after its expiration date.)

## Summary

Over-the-counter medication labels provide helpful information for the safe and effective use of various medications. However, it is important to read over-the-counter medication labels and follow directions carefully.

## Reference

*Senior Series Volume 2*, The Center on Rural Elderly, University of Missouri System.

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