
Health Hints

Use Caution With Pain Relievers

(NAPS)—Pain relievers, when used correctly, are safe and effective. Millions of people use these medicines every day. Not using them according to the label directions can have serious consequences.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) wants consumers to benefit from these medicines and not be hurt by them. You should know the active ingredients and directions of all your medicines before you use them.

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines list all their active ingredients on the package. For prescription drugs, the leaflet that comes with your prescription lists the active ingredients contained in the medicine.

Many OTC medicines sold for different uses have the same active ingredient. Also, active ingredients in OTC medicines can be ingredients in prescription medicines. For example, a cold-and-cough remedy may have the same active ingredient as a headache remedy or a prescription pain reliever.

There are basically two types of OTC pain relievers. Some contain acetaminophen and others contain non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). These medicines are used to relieve the minor aches and pains associated with headaches, colds, flu, arthritis, toothaches, and menstrual cramps.

These medicines are also used to treat migraine headaches, and to reduce fever.

Acetaminophen is a very common pain reliever and fever reducer. Taking too much of this active ingredient can lead to liver damage. The risk for liver damage may be increased if you drink three or more alcoholic drinks while using acetaminophen-containing medicines.



Careless use of acetaminophen can cause more pain.

NSAIDs are common pain relievers and fever reducers. Examples of OTC NSAIDs are aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, and ketoprofen. Your risk for stomach bleeding may increase if you are over 60, taking prescription blood thinners, have previous stomach ulcers or other bleeding problems.

If you have any of these factors, you should talk to your doctor before using NSAIDs.

NSAIDs can also cause reversible damage to the kidneys. The risk of kidney damage may increase in people who are over 60, people who have high blood pressure, heart disease or pre-existing kidney disease, and people who are taking a diuretic.

The FDA recommends that you talk with your healthcare professional if you have questions about using OTC medicine before using it in combination with other medicines—either OTC or prescription medicine.

You can learn more about what medicines are right for you by reading the label carefully and talking to your healthcare professional or pharmacist.

For more information, visit www.fda.gov or call 1-888-INFO-FDA.