

PAIN and Over-the-Counter Medications

What is pain?

- a usually localized physical sensation occurring in different levels of severity due to injury, disease or surgery
- pain may be acute or chronic
 - acute pain is short-lived and lasts less than 3 months
 - chronic pain lasts longer than 3 months and is usually harder to control

How do I describe my pain to my pharmacist or health care professional?

- where does it hurt?
- does the pain move? if so, when and how does it move?
- when did it start?
- is it a steady pain?
- how would you rate the pain on a 10 point scale? (for example, 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain you have ever felt)
- how does it feel? is it sharp or dull, stabbing or burning, cramping or twisting?
- how does it affect your daily life or sleep?
- what makes it worse? what makes it better?

What should I know about over-the-counter pain relievers?

What kinds are available?

- there are 2 types of over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers: acetaminophen (aka APAP, paracetamol), and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, aspirin (aka ASA) or naproxen
- both types reduce fever and relieve pain, however only NSAIDs reduce swelling
- these agents are found in many medications for headache and pain relief
- these agents may also be found in medicines taken for colds, flu, arthritis, toothaches, menstrual cramps, fever, sinus congestion, heart conditions and allergies

How should I use OTC pain relievers?

- these medications are safe and effective when taken as directed
- follow the product's label directions carefully and do not go over the recommended dose unless your doctor tells you to
- be aware that other medicines you are taking may contain the same ingredients which may cause you to accidentally take more than the normal dose
- different forms of pain relievers may contain different amounts of drug. For example, the acetaminophen infant drop formulation is 3 times stronger than the children's suspension. Make sure you read the drug labels every time you use a drug.
- taking too much acetaminophen may lead to serious liver damage, especially if taken with more than 3 alcoholic drinks

- NSAIDs may cause stomach bleeding or kidney failure if not carefully monitored. The following people should not take NSAIDs unless prescribed by your doctor:
 - patients who are allergic to aspirin or other pain relievers
 - patients taking blood thinners (for example warfarin)
 - patients taking corticosteroids (such as prednisone)
 - patients taking other prescription NSAIDs (such as indomethacin)
 - patients taking low dose aspirin
 - patients with a previous history of stomach bleeds
 - patients with severe kidney disease, liver disease, diabetes or hypertension
 - patients who drink 3 or more alcoholic beverages per day.
- if your OTC medication does not help your pain or if you need to take your OTC medication for more than a couple of weeks, call your doctor
- if you have questions make sure to ask your pharmacist or a health care professional

Commonly used products containing acetaminophen:

Tylenol(R)
 Excedrin(R)
 Bayer(R) Select
 Contac(R) Cough and Cold
 Nyquil(R) Cold and Flu
 Vicodin(R)
 Percocet(R)

Commonly used products containing ibuprofen

Advil(R)
 Motrin(R)
 Dayquil(R) Sinus Pressure and Cold Relief
 Dimetapp(R) Sinus
 Distran Sinus(R)

Commonly used products containing aspirin

Bayer(R)
 Anacin(R)
 Bufferin(R)
 Alka-Seltzer(R)
 Fiorinal(R)
 Percodan(R)

Commonly-used products containing naproxen

Aleve(R)
 Anaprox(R)
 Naprosyn(R)

*Note: these lists are not all inclusive. If you have any questions regarding your medications, please ask your local pharmacist.