Indications: This section tells you what the medicine is used for. Usually, the indications are for short-term problems which are expected to clear up in a few days.

Directions for Use: This section tells you how to use the medicine safely. Sometimes there are different doses for different age groups. Dosages for older adults are not usually given. Ask your pharmacist about the right does for you.

Active Ingredients/Inactive Ingredients: This section tells you the chemical names of the active and inactive ingredients. If you are watching out for certain ingredients such as alcohol, dye, preservatives, sugar or sodium, you should read this section carefully.

Warnings or Precautions for Use: This section tells you about side effects, drug interactions and medical conditions which may be aggravated by use of this medication. It may also list special “precautions for use” such as taking the medicine with food. Some OTC labels have a special section just for drug interactions. Read all sections carefully and make sure you understand exactly what all the information means. Talk to the pharmacist about any information on the label which may be unclear to you.

The ElderCare Patient Education Series includes:

- Aging and Your Response to Medicines
- Alcohol: Friend or Foe?
- Caregiver's Guide to Using Medicines
- Consumer's Quick Reference to Using Medicines
- Eye Medicines: May Be More Than Meets the Eye
- Home Safety Issues: Poison Prevention for Older Adults
- How to Select Your Pharmacy & Pharmacist
- Medicines and Travel
- Over-the-Counter Medicines Choosing the Right Nonprescription Drug
- Personal Medicine Record
- Questions You May Have About Generic Medicines
- Vitamins Are Not Enough: A Nutritional and Vitamin Guide for Older Adults

The Peter Lamy Center for Drug Therapy and Aging
University of Maryland School of Pharmacy
OTC Medicines

- Do not require a doctor’s prescription.
- Are safe and effective when used as directed.
- Can be used for minor problems of short duration.

But OTCs, as with any prescription medication, can . . .

- interact with other medicines you may be taking.
- worsen certain medical problems.
- be dangerous in high doses or over long periods without supervision.

Choosing the right product can be difficult, especially when you are taking other medicines or being treated for certain conditions.

For example:
People with high blood pressure should avoid products with:
- Decongestants
- High salt (sodium) content

People with diabetes should avoid products with:
- Sucrose (sugar)
- Corn syrup (high in sugar)
- Alcohol

People taking anticoagulants (blood thinners) should avoid products with:
- Aspirin
- Alcohol

Talk with your Pharmacist

Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

- If you have difficulty reading and understanding the technical information on the label.
- If you have any confusion about the product.
- Drugs once only available by prescription may now be sold over the counter and in different doses.

Ask your pharmacist . . .

- Is this medicine safe for me?
- Will it help my problem?
- Is this medicine the best choice for me?
- How long should it take to notice results?
- Can this medicine interact with any of my other medicines?
- Can I take this medicine at the same time that I take my other medicines?
- How long can I safely use this medicine?
- Should I take this medicine with food or on an empty stomach?
- What are the most common side effects I should watch out for?

Be prepared to tell the pharmacist...

- What medical conditions you have.
- What other medicines (both prescription and over-the-counter) or supplements you take.
- What you have tried in the past to relieve this problem.

Carry a medicine record card listing all your medicines and your medical conditions.