

Guide to Reading an OTC Label

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 dose 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

OTCs Over-the-Counter Medicines

Choosing the Right
 Nonprescription Medicine



THE PETER LAMY CENTER
 for Drug Therapy and Aging

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.



Take Note

If you have any questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist before choosing an OTC product.

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.