

# OVER-THE-COUNTER (OTC) DRUGS

## BACKGROUND

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicine are sold directly to individuals without a prescription and treat a variety of ailments. OTC drugs typically have a lower risk of abuse than prescription medicine,

### MISUSE OF AN OTC MEDICINE MEANS:

- Taking medicine in a way or dose other than directed on the package
- Taking medicine for a non-medical effect (to get high)
- Mixing OTC medicines together to create new products

### COMMONLY MISUSED OTC DRUGS:

- Cough medicines
- Cold medicines
- Motion sickness pills
- Pain relievers
- Laxatives
- Caffeine pills
- Diet pills

## DRUG-FOOD INTERACTIONS

Food may change how your body processes some OTC or prescription medicines. Sometimes what you eat and drink can affect the ingredients in a medicine you're taking. This can prevent the medicine from working the way it should. If you take a medicine with food but the directions say not to, your body might not be able to absorb the medicine the right way. Some medicines should be taken on an empty stomach, while some medicines are processed better when you take them with food. Make sure you read all labels beforehand.

## DRUG-DRUG INTERACTIONS

Drug interactions can increase the chance of side effects from medicines you are taking. The main interaction types are:

**DUPLICATION:** Taking two medicines that have similar active ingredients can give you more medicine than you need. An example is when you take OTC ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) plus a prescription anti-inflammatory medicine, which can hurt your kidneys or liver.

**OPPOSITION:** Medicines that have opposite effects on your body may reduce the effectiveness of one or both medicines. For example, OTC decongestants may raise your blood pressure, which can work against medicines that lower your blood pressure.

**ALTERATION:** One medicine may change the way your body absorbs, spreads, or processes another medicine. For example, aspirin can change the way some prescription blood-thinning medicines work.

## SAFETY TIPS

1. Always start by reading the label – all of it.
2. Look for an OTC medicine that will treat only the symptoms you have.
3. Know what to avoid while taking an OTC medicine.
4. When in doubt, ask a pharmacist or doctor before you buy or use an OTC medicine.
5. Take the medicine EXACTLY as stated on the label.
6. Use extra caution when taking more than one OTC drug product at a time.
7. Don't combine prescription medicines and OTC drugs without talking to a healthcare professional first.
8. Keep a list of all the OTC medicines, prescription drugs, dietary supplements and herbal remedies you take.
9. Don't use OTC medicines after their expiration date.



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