

TOPIC SUPPLEMENT

HEART

FEBRUARY
2014

INSIGHT[®]

Healthy Living for Patients, Their Families & Caregivers

Know your medicines

Brought to you by



A supplement from the
Editors of *Heart Insight*
sponsored by McNeil
Consumer Health



American
Heart
Association[®]

Learn and Live

WWW.HEARTINSIGHT.COM

Understanding



medicine labels

If you're like 82 percent of Americans, you take at least one medicine each week. Whether you're reaching for a prescription (Rx) pain reliever for a backache or an over-the-counter (OTC) medicine for a stuffy nose, you need to know what you're taking. By reading and following the label directions before you take a pill, you'll learn key facts to help you safely use the medicine.

Adverse drug events are the reason for 700,000 emergency room visits in the United States each year. What can go wrong? For one, medicines can interact with each other to cause an adverse reaction. Aspirin, for example, isn't recommended for people taking a Rx blood thinner like warfarin (brand name Coumadin®). This is because both medicines slow blood clotting, which could cause excessive bleeding. Reading and following the label can help you avoid taking the wrong medicine.

Many Rx and OTC medicines can have the same active ingredients. For example, you'll find acetaminophen, the active ingredient in Tylenol®, in more than 600 OTC and Rx medicines. These include cough and cold products, allergy medicines, pain relievers and sleep aids. If taken as directed, acetaminophen is safe and effective for reducing pain and relieving fever. But if you don't read and follow the label and take more than one medicine that contains acetaminophen, you could take too much. This can put you at risk for liver damage.

"Reading and following the label is an important safeguard when taking medicine," says Janet P. Engle, Pharm.D., Ph.D., professor and head of the Department of Pharmacy Practice at the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy in Chicago. Here are some key label facts that can help you take your medicine correctly and avoid potentially life-threatening side effects.

DECODING THE OTC DRUG FACTS LABEL

All OTC medicines have a standard *Drug Facts* label, which is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It tells you how much of a medicine to take and when. It also tells you whether it's safe to use with other medicines, along with other

important information. Here's a label overview.

Active Ingredients: Lists the ingredients of a medicine that make it work on the illness or symptom it's treating. It also lists the amount of the drug in each dose. Many medicines have just one active ingredient. But a combination medicine, which treats more than one symptom, may have two or more. As a general rule, don't take more than one medicine with the same active ingredient. Doing so can put you at risk for overdose.

Uses: Describes the symptoms the medicine treats. "If the symptoms listed are similar on different medicines, such as 'sneezing, runny nose, itchy, watery eyes,' call your doctor or talk to the pharmacist before taking [the medicines] to avoid possibly doubling up on similarly acting drugs," Engle says.

Warnings: Tells you when a medicine shouldn't be used. It also tells you when you should talk to a doctor or pharmacist before taking it. Any common side effects that may happen are listed. It also tells you what other medicines or substances to avoid while taking the medicine.

Directions: Tells you the amount of medicine to take and how often to take it. It also tells you how much you can take in one day. Don't take more than the recommended dose on the label. Also, don't take it for more days than the label recommends. "Just because one pill is good doesn't mean two is better," Engle says. Taking more than the recommended dose won't bring you faster relief. Instead, it could put you at risk of an overdose.

Other information: Describes how to store the medicine. "If it says 'protect from excessive moisture or heat,' avoid storing the medicine in a bathroom where you take showers or right next to the stove," Engle says. Instead, keep the medicine in a cabinet that's away from heat and moisture. If you have children or pets, keep it on a high shelf in a closet. If you need to take your medicine each morning and you don't have kids, it's OK to store your medicine next to your cereal bowl. This can help you remember to take it. But don't forget to put your medicines up

BY SANDRA GORDON

OTC LITERACY

UNDERSTANDING THE LABEL

Drug Facts help you understand the medicines that you take and how to take them safely.
All medicines should be taken with the direct supervision of a parent or trusted adult.



ACTIVE INGREDIENTS
The ingredients in the medicine that make it work.



WARNINGS
Safety information including side effects, the questions you should ask a doctor before taking the medicine, and which medicines to avoid using at the same time.



OTHER INFORMATION
How to store the medicine.



USES
Describes the symptoms that the medicine treats.



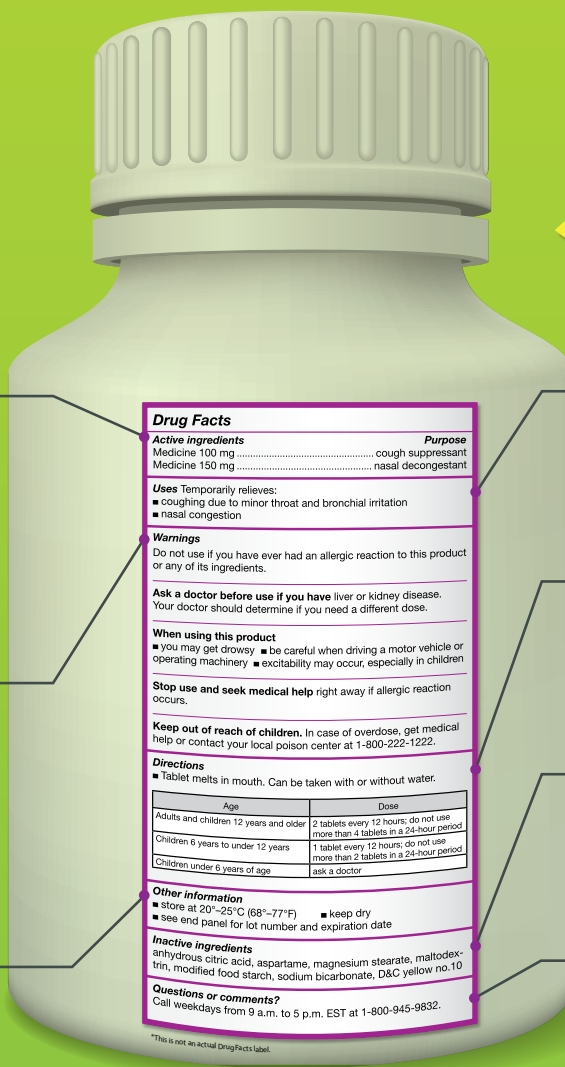
DIRECTIONS
Indicates the amount or dose of medicine to take, how often to take it, and how much you can take in one day.



INACTIVE INGREDIENTS
Ingredients not intended to treat your symptoms (e.g., preservatives, flavorings).



QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?
Call the company if you have questions about a specific medicine.



Drug Facts

Active ingredients **Purpose**
Medicine 100 mg cough suppressant
Medicine 150 mg nasal decongestant

Uses Temporarily relieves:
■ coughing due to minor throat and bronchial irritation
■ nasal congestion

Warnings
Do not use if you have ever had an allergic reaction to this product or any of its ingredients.

Ask a doctor before use if you have liver or kidney disease.
Your doctor should determine if you need a different dose.

When using this product
■ you may get drowsy ■ be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery ■ excitability may occur, especially in children

Stop use and seek medical help right away if allergic reaction occurs.

Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact your local poison center at 1-800-222-1222.

Directions

■ Tablet melts in mouth. Can be taken with or without water.

Age	Dose
Adults and children 12 years and older	2 tablets every 12 hours; do not use more than 4 tablets in a 24-hour period
Children 6 years to under 12 years	1 tablet every 12 hours; do not use more than 2 tablets in a 24-hour period
Children under 6 years of age	ask a doctor

Other information

■ Store at 20°–25°C (68°–77°F) ■ keep dry
■ See end panel for lot number and expiration date

Inactive ingredients
anhydrous citric acid, aspartame, magnesium stearate, maltodextrin, modified food starch, sodium bicarbonate, D&C yellow no. 10

Questions or comments?

Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST at 1-800-945-9832.

*This is not an actual Drug Facts label.

and away, when children come over to visit.

Inactive Ingredients: Inactive ingredients are the parts of the medicine that don't treat symptoms. They can include ingredients such as lactose or dyes that may cause allergic reactions. "Sodium may also be listed here, which can be an issue for somebody with high blood pressure or congestive heart failure," Engle says.

Questions or comments?: Lists the manufacturer's telephone number and the hours they're open. If you read an OTC medicine label and still have questions about the product, call them. You can also talk to your doctor or pharmacist. "We're happy to answer questions about OTC medicines," Engle says. "We can direct you to the right medicine given your condition and your medical history."

DECIPHERING RX DRUG LABELS

Unlike OTC medicines, Rx medicine labels can vary depending on the state where the drug is prescribed. But most Rx drugs contain the same basic label information, including:

Drug: The drug name, strength and quantity. *Pill pointer:* When your doctor writes your Rx, ask him or her to tell you the name of the medicine. Take notes about how to take it. Know what the medicine is for, too. You're more likely to use it correctly and know what to expect from it. Then, check the label at the pharmacy. In the unlikely event that the pharmacist gives you the wrong medicine or the wrong strength, you'll be more likely to spot the mistake because you've heard the medicine name. Also, double-check the label each time you take your medicine to make sure you're taking the right one. If you're taking more than one medicine, it's easy to confuse them.

Pharmacy: The pharmacy's name, address and telephone number.

Rx #: A serial number assigned only to that Rx.

Date: The current date you're filling the Rx.

Who the Rx is for: The patient's name. *Pill pointer:* Mix-ups are rare. Still, make sure that the name on the bottle is yours.

Pill description: This tells you what the pill looks like, such as "this is a round orange pill." If the pills look different than what you think you're supposed to get, ask the pharmacist. It may be the same medicine in a different form, or a generic form of the medicine. It's always good to ask.

Discard after: The expiration date of your medicine. After this date, a drug may not be safe or effective to use. Ask your pharmacist how to safely discard the medicine.

The prescriber: The name of the doctor who prescribed the medicine.

The pharmacist: The initials or name of the pharmacist who filled your Rx.

Directions for use: Instructions for taking the medicine and any precautions as indicated on the Rx. *Pill pointer:* If the container tells you to take the medicine with food or a specific beverage, like milk, take it as directed. If a medicine causes drowsiness, don't take it with another medicine that also makes you sleepy, like an antihistamine (allergy medicine). If label instructions are vague, such as "take three times a day," ask your pharmacist or doctor to clarify. Ask, "Does that mean every eight hours?"

Phone number: The telephone number of the pharmacy that filled your Rx. Call the pharmacy if you have any questions. Some good ones to ask: What should I do if I forget a dose? Should I take this medicine before, during or after meals? What are the possible side effects? What should I do if I experience side effects? Are there other medicines or foods I should avoid while I'm taking this medicine?

Bar codes: These aren't found on all Rx labels, but some bottles may have them. Bar codes can help pharmacists prevent medicine mistakes when the Rx is filled.

READ UP!

Before taking an Rx medicine, read the medication guide. This handout comes with many Rx medicines. It lists the medicine's active ingredients and contains other information that can help you avoid serious adverse events. It can help you avoid overdosing on active ingredients or getting the wrong medicine.

Keep medicine in its original container. If you're using a pill dispenser, keep the original container. This way you always have access to the directions, interactions and the medicine's expiration date.

Before you take any medicine, be sure to read—and follow—the label directions. Take the time to understand the uses, warnings, directions, and other important information on both Rx and OTC drug labels. This will help you avoid problems and stay safe!



Managing your



medicines



With all of the different medicines available for all of the things that ail us, keeping track of them can be overwhelming. If you have

BY SUSAN KREIMER

a heart condition, managing your medicines can be doubly difficult. Chances are that you take more than one medicine daily, whether it's a prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) drug. Each medicine may treat a different symptom or problem, and each comes with separate instructions. You need to take all your medicines as directed for them to be most effective. Your doctor and pharmacist can help you better understand the correct amounts and when and how often to take both prescription and OTC medicines.

"When a new prescription is written, the patient should know what the medicine is and what it is being used for, the dosage and duration of treatment," says Sophia De Monte, R.Ph., spokeswoman for the American Pharmacists Association and a pharmacy manager at Costco® in Nesconset, N.Y. "Don't be afraid to ask questions. Your pharmacist is the most accessible healthcare professional."

To be fully informed, De Monte suggests talking with your doctor. Whether you're taking prescribed medicines, OTC drugs or both, get the answers to these questions:

- Should I take this medicine instead of another drug that I've been prescribed, or is this an additional treatment?
- What is this medicine supposed to do for me?
- What are some common side effects?
- Are there any interactions with my other prescriptions or OTC medicines?
- Which foods, supplements and activities could interfere with this medicine?
- Are there any special storage requirements?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How long does it take this drug to take effect?

Pharmacy software checks for medicine duplication and interactions, says De Monte, and can alert you to possible

problems before you start taking a medicine. "It's becoming a part of the practice to schedule an appointment with a patient who has a chronic condition or complex therapies," De Monte says. "[The pharmacist] goes over all of the medicines that the patient is taking. This is called MTM, or medication therapy management."

SHARE YOUR INFORMATION

The American Heart Association recommends making your doctor and pharmacist aware of all the medicines you are taking. This means both prescription and OTC medicines. Let your physician and pharmacist know about any allergies you have. Don't forget to mention which supplements, herbs, or vitamins you use. Some medicines, foods and supplements or vitamins could conflict with each other and cause problems.

If possible, try to go to the same pharmacy each time you fill a prescription. There are benefits to having all of your prescriptions filled at one pharmacy, says Selig D. Corman, R.Ph., director of professional affairs at the Pharmacists Society of the State of New York in Albany. "That provides a complete

patient profile so the pharmacist can efficiently counsel proper use of medicines and prevent possible interactions. Also, the pharmacist can determine if the patient is compliant because of intervals between refills."

If the interval between refills is too long, it indicates that a patient could be skipping doses. On the flip side, notes Selig, if the time between refills is too frequent, this could mean that a patient is taking more medicine than the doctor has prescribed. For your safety, your pharmacist can monitor the timeliness of your refills and alert you if anything out of the ordinary raises a red flag.

It's also important to try and buy any OTC medicines at the same pharmacy where you get your prescriptions filled. That way, if you have questions about whether an OTC medicine will interact with prescription medicines you are taking, the pharmacist can let you know because he or she will have access to your prescription records.

MIND YOUR MEDS

Keeping track of your medicines on a daily basis is also

important. This can become a challenge if you have to take several different medicines each day. But there are ways to help you remember what you have already taken on any given day and what you still need to take.

A plastic pillbox marked with days of the week can be very useful for this purpose. Just be sure to keep it and all medicines up and out of the sight of children who are in, or may visit your home. You can also keep a list with the names and dosages of all the medicines you're taking, both prescription and OTC. Be sure to include when you should take them. "The list should be kept in [your] wallet," De Monte advises. This way you always have it with you. It's also a good idea to put the list in a visible place at home, like on your fridge.

"For convenience," she adds, "dosing is scheduled with an easily remembered event—at meals, bedtime, first thing

The dos and don'ts of medicine safety

- Do take all your prescribed medicines as directed by your doctor and pharmacist.
- Do read the label on your medicine's container (See Understanding Medicine Labels, on page 2, to learn how to read prescription and OTC drug labels.) Most drugs can be stored at room temperature, so refrigeration is usually not required. Read the label to be sure.
- Don't store medicines in your bathroom's medicine cabinet. It can get hot and steamy in there. Also keep them away from your kitchen stove or dishwasher.
- Do check expiration dates on prescription and OTC medicines. Throw away any that have expired. Ask your pharmacist about the best way to dispose of medicines.
- Don't hesitate to ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions about how to store your medicines properly.
- Do take precautions when small children or pets are around, even as visitors. Place all medicines up and away and out of sight (visitupandaway.org for more information on storing medicines safely).

in the morning, breakfast and dinner.” This type of schedule is easier to follow than remembering to take your medicine once a day or every eight hours, for example. It’s important to follow labeled dosing instructions, so make taking your medicines part of your daily routine. Associate a dose with a daily event.

Whichever system works for an individual patient is what’s recommended, says John Gordon Harold, M.D., president of the American College of Cardiology and a clinical professor of medicine at the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute and the University of California, Los Angeles. It can be helpful to lay out doses for an entire week in a pillbox. A loved one or caregiver may be able to help with this regimen.

Upon taking each dose, check off a box on a piece of paper or a calendar. You can even download a medicine tracker app to your smartphone. These apps let you track each time you take your medicines. Many are free, like MedCoach Medication Reminder and MediSafe Virtual Pillbox. Be sure to take this information with you to your next doctor’s appointment. It lets the doctor know that you have followed instructions. Patients don’t always fill prescriptions, for reasons like cost, etc., so your doctor can’t assume you have taken a medicine as directed.

Taking steps to keep all your medicines safe and away from children and pets is important, too. Always store your medicines in their original container. This container has a label that tells you what it is and how to take it. Never crush or split tablets without asking your doctor or pharmacist first because some medicines must be swallowed whole. See “The Dos and Don’ts of medicine safety” on page xx for more safety tips.

BE CONSISTENT

If you have a heart stent, Harold recommends checking with your cardiologist before getting a colonoscopy or any medical procedure that may require fasting or being on a specific diet, even for one day. Some medicines, like blood thinners, should not be stopped during the 12 months after stent placement

due to the risk of clotting. This includes aspirin and clopidogrel (brand name Plavix®).

“It’s very important to take your medicines consistently,” says Daniel Spogen, M.D., a professor and chairman of family medicine at the University of Nevada, Reno. “Almost always, you want to take them at the same time of day.”

Of course, there are times when you can’t. For instance, you may not feel up to taking your medicine when you feel sick to your stomach or have a cold or the flu. When you can’t take your medicine at the usual time, you might be able to take it later that day. But be sure to ask your doctor first. This helps keep a steady level of medicine in your bloodstream, Spogen says.

But with some medicines, it isn’t safe to take two doses at once or closely spaced together. With medicine for high blood pressure, doubling up could be dangerous. It can cause blood pressure to drop too low.

Taking too much or too little of any prescription or OTC medicine could be harmful. “Anytime there’s confusion, it’s definitely a good idea to call your doctor or pharmacist,” says Spogen.

PLAY IT SAFE

Managing your medicines may be a bit time-consuming. But it’s important if you want to avoid problems from getting too much or too little of what you need. Taking some extra time to keep your prescription and OTC medicines safe and properly taking the medicines your doctor recommends will go a long way in helping you stay healthy.



Over-the-counter

Take care when you take them



medicines:



More than 300,000 over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are sold in over 750,000 retail stores across

the country. With those kinds of numbers, the chance of someone taking something by mistake is high. Eighty-one percent of U.S. adults use OTC medicines. Last year, OTC sales totaled \$29.3 billion.

Before you reach for an OTC medication, however, avoid the desire to “play doctor.”

“Always discuss with your doctor if you’re going to start a new medicine of any kind—prescription or not,” says Robert O. Bonow, M.D., M.S., Goldberg Distinguished Professor of Cardiology, director of the Center for Cardiovascular Innovation at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago and past president of the American Heart Association. “Make sure all your doctors know everything you’re taking, especially the ‘quarterback’ in charge of your overall care.”

Before you buy an OTC medicine, read the label carefully. Make sure you know what ingredients are in the medicine, how you should take it and what side effects could happen. (See our article “Understanding Medicine Labels” on page 2 for tips on reading OTC medicine labels.)

BY STEPHANIE STEPHENS

KNOW WHAT YOU’RE TAKING

If you already have a condition that requires you to take a prescription medicine, be sure you let your doctor know before you start an OTC medicine. Bonow is watchful about knowing who’s taking what among his patients. “Today, my patient already taking three heart drugs told me about a new drug he’s taking—and I hadn’t heard of it yet,” Bonow says. “I said, ‘I’m going to look into it for you.’ Drugs cannot only interact, but one drug may make another less effective. It’s easy to tip the balance in the wrong direction.”

HEART MEDICINES AND OTC DRUGS

OTC medicines are mostly safe and effective if they’re taken correctly, says Jay Strawser, Pharm.D., staff pharmacist at the



Cleveland Clinic. The goal is to take the lowest amount for the shortest period of time that will relieve your symptoms.

If you're taking a blood thinner or medicines to treat heart failure, don't take any vitamins or supplements without checking with your doctor first. Supplements can affect heart medicines you're taking, and the results can be dangerous. For example, the herb St. John's wort is often recommended for depression, anxiety or insomnia. But it also causes certain enzymes in the

body to break down heart medicines like the blood thinner warfarin (brand name Coumadin®) and digoxin, which is used to treat heart failure symptoms. "[This breakdown] could potentially lead to clotting," says Strawser.

If you're already taking a prescription statin to control your cholesterol, don't take the supplement red yeast rice. This product is marketed as a "natural" statin. The process by which a prescription statin is metabolized (processed by the body) in the liver may compete with enzymes that process other drugs, says Bonow.

If you're taking medicine to control high blood pressure or arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms), be careful when looking for a medicine to treat cold or flu symptoms. Many OTC cold and flu medicines contain the nasal decongestant pseudoephedrine. This is a stimulant that can increase your blood pressure and heart rate. Use a saline nasal spray to flush things out or a decongestant nasal spray instead to help reduce swelling. Ask your doctor which one may work best for you.

If allergies are bothering you, you may look for an antihistamine to stop itching or help a sneezy, runny nose. But if you have a heart condition, antihistamines can cause a fast heartbeat. If you have this reaction, stop taking the antihistamine right away and call your doctor.

Also be aware of any OTC medicines or supplements that may contain caffeine. For example, green tea extract contains caffeine and is marketed in pill form as a health supplement. Some combination headache and migraine pills may contain caffeine. Caffeine can affect sleep, make you nervous, increase your heart

rate and even cause irregular heartbeats in people who are very sensitive to it.

If you're looking for relief from aches and pains, the most used OTC medicines are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). These include ibuprofen (brand names Advil® and Motrin®) or naproxen (brand name Aleve®). Be aware that prescription and other OTC medicines like cold and flu medicines or sleep aids could also contain NSAIDs.

OTC NSAIDs are labeled for up to 10 days of use. If you need pain relief after 10 days, contact your doctor. The risk of heart attack or stroke may increase if you use more than directed or for longer than directed.

NSAIDs may upset your stomach and cause pain or even bleeding. The chance of your stomach bleeding from taking an NSAID increases if you take a blood thinner or steroid.

You should never take an NSAID right before or after heart surgery. If you have high blood pressure, heart disease, liver cirrhosis or kidney disease, ask your doctor or pharmacist if you should take an NSAID. Some people can have heartburn or diarrhea from taking NSAIDs.

That old standby, aspirin, is an NSAID. It's used to reduce pain and fever. It's also recommended to slow down blood clotting, often at a lower dose (a "baby" aspirin). If you're already taking prescription anti-clotting medicines, don't take aspirin without talking to your doctor first. And if you're already taking aspirin for heart attack or stroke, talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking ibuprofen because it can decrease the benefit of aspirin.

Acetaminophen, which is sold under the brand name Tylenol®, is another popular OTC medicine. More than 600 OTC and prescription medicines contain acetaminophen. It's safe and effective for reducing pain and relieving fever. However, if you take more than one medicine that contains acetaminophen, you could take too much, which could cause liver damage.

DON'T "MIX IT UP"

Before you take more than one medicine at a time, it's best to leave managing a "drug-drug" interaction to your healthcare providers. Be prepared when you see your doctor by keeping a list of all medicines you're currently taking. This list should include prescriptions, OTC drugs, vitamins and supplements. Update the list whenever anything changes. Print out a current sheet to take with you. Not sharing information could be hazardous to your health.

"Don't guess, but always ask if you have any questions," says Bonow.

WE EASED YOUR BACK PAIN



You made it the best play date ever



© McNEIL-PPC, Inc. 2014

TYLENOL is clinically proven to provide strong, fast pain relief.



Use only as directed