

CHILDREN'S HEALTH IS IMPORTANT: KNOW YOUR PHARMACIST, KNOW YOUR MEDICATION

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The use of medicines, both prescription and over the counter (OTC), is increasing among children. One out of eight children take medicines regularly. As a parent or caregiver, you can protect children's health by asking questions and reading the label on all the medicines selected for a child. Use this publication help you safely give medicine to children.

What you need to know about prescription medicines that are given to a child by mouth:

- Name the medicine
- Purpose of the medicine
- The dose (amount) of the medicine to give
- How, when and for how long to take the medicine
- Foods, beverages or other medicines the child should avoid
- If the medicine should be given with food or on an empty stomach
- Side effects that may occur and what should be done if a child experiences these side effects

Medicine instructions vary. You may see instructions to give medicines a certain number of times a day or instructions to give medications every so many hours. These instructions usually mean the same thing but are worded differently.

- "Take every six hours" usually means to take the medicine four times a day at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bedtime. You do not have to wake up a child in the middle of the night to take medicine.
- "Take every eight hours" usually means the medicine should be taken three times a day.

Tips for Giving Children Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicine:

- When a child gets sick, you may reach for an over-the-counter (OTC) medicine. However, OTC medicines are serious medicines that can be harmful if taken incorrectly.
- Always follow the dosing directions on the label. Use a dropper or dosing cup that comes with the medicine to accurately measure the dose. Do not use a household spoon or guess the amount, because you may give the child too much or not enough medicine.
- Read the Drug Facts label carefully to know the uses, warnings and side effects.
- Cold and cough medicines do not cure a cold or cough. These congestion, fever and body aches. Using these medicines will not shorten the length of time a child is sick.
- Cough and cold medicines should not be given to children under 4 years of age. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be given to children under 4 years of age to treat fever. For children less that 6 months of age, ask a pediatrician if you can give ibuprofen before giving the first dose. Read the label for dosage instructions.

- If you are giving a child two or more OTC medicines, read the “Drug Facts” label and compare active ingredients and the purpose of each. Make sure the medicines do not contain the same active ingredients or different active ingredients that serve the same purpose. Giving a child multiple of these medicines could result in giving the child a dose that is too large.
- Ask your pharmacist any questions you have about any over-the-counter medicines.

Always check your with pharmacist before giving children OTC medicine. These medicines are as powerful as some prescription medicines. OTC medicines can interact with prescription or other OTC medicines and could badly affect other health conditions.

Safety Tips

- Teach children that medicines are not candy.
- Keep all medicines out of a child’s reach. Remind relatives to do the same when children visit them.
- Always give children the amount of prescribed or recommended for each medicine. Giving too much medicine can be dangerous - more is not better.
- Keep in mind that most OTC medicines are for short-term relief of minor symptoms. Call the child’s doctor if the condition persists or gets worse.
- Always share the OTC medicines and dietary supplements that the child’s doctor and pharmacists before a new medicine is prescribed.

If you or your child have any problems with a medication, such as unpleasant side effects, call your doctor or pharmacist right away. If you ever have a question about a medication or suspect your child is having a reaction and you cannot get ahold of your doctor or pharmacist, you can call the Tennessee Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222. This service is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To learn more about the center, [visit tnpoisoncenter.org](http://tnpoisoncenter.org) or vumc.org/poison-control

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