

# Partners in Quality Care

## Over the Counter Medications (OTCs) can be very beneficial at times.

But, when patients are also on other prescribed medications and/or have certain medical conditions, it is very important that they discuss taking OTC medications with a qualified clinician **first**— such as a physician, pharmacist or other qualified clinician.

- ▶ OTC medications and herbal remedies may cause some unwanted and even dangerous side effects
- ▶ It is important to understand exactly what the OTC medication or herbal remedy contains
- ▶ In the elderly, some conditions can become worse by some OTC medications or herbal remedies
- ▶ It is important that the physician is aware of all OTC medications or herbal remedies your patient is taking

## What is the Aide's Role?

**Becoming aware of the different types of over the counter medications and their potential side effects is vital in helping your patients avoid unwanted side effects and serious risks to their health.**

- Alert your nurse supervisor if you see your patient using over the counter medications and herbal remedies
- Alert your nurse supervisor if your patient seems confused, difficult to arouse, is dizzy, has blurred vision, complains of ear ringing, has nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation or other GI symptoms, has a black stool, is bleeding, complains their heart is racing or they feel nervous. All these are potential side effects of over the counter medications.

## Some Examples

### Pain Medications

- There are 2 main types of OTC pain relievers:
  - acetaminophen (for example, Tylenol)
  - nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories also called NSAIDs (for example, Aspirin, Ibuprofen and Naproxen)
- Some products may contain both aspirin and acetaminophen (for example, Excedrin)
- OTC pain meds can help relieve pain caused by headaches, muscle aches and stiffness

### Possible Side Effects

- Liver damage can occur in people who consume alcohol and take acetaminophen
- NSAIDs may cause stomach problems, including bleeding and kidney damage

Before taking NSAIDs patients should consult a physician if they ...

- Are allergic to aspirin or other pain relievers
- Drink alcohol every day
- Have bleeding in the stomach or intestines, or have peptic (stomach) ulcers
- Have liver or kidney disease
- Have heart disease
- Take blood-thinning medicine or have a bleeding disorder

**Herbal remedies may be “natural” but can still have side effects. Be sure and alert your nurse supervisor if your patient is taking herbal remedies.**

## Cough Medicines

There are 2 main types:

- Cough suppressants
- Expectorants

### Possible Side Effects

- Irritability
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness

***It is important to use the right kind of cough medicine.***

***Care should be taken when using cough medicines that are combined with pain relievers, decongestants or antihistamines if you are taking other medications***

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## Decongestants

- These help to reduce stuffy noses caused by a cold or flu
- Pseudoephedrine (for example, Sudafed, Contac Non Drowsy)
- Phenylephrine (for example, Sudafed PE)

### Possible Side Effects

- Nervousness
- Dizziness
- Sleeping problems
- Heart palpitations
- Increased blood pressure

***The doctor needs to be consulted before taking these OTC medications if patients have high BP, glaucoma, heart conditions, thyroid problems, diabetes, or prostate problems***

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## Allergy Medications

- 1st generation antihistamines include:
  - Benadryl
  - Dimetapp
  - NyQuil
- 2nd generation antihistamines include
  - Claritin
  - Zyrtec

***Many of these may be mixed with other meds such as decongestants and pain relievers***

### Possible Side Effects

- 1st generation antihistamines can cause:
  - Drowsiness
  - Dry mouth and eyes
  - Abdominal pain
  - Headaches
- It is important for the patient to talk to their physician if they already taking sleeping pills, sedatives or muscle relaxants

**Before taking 1st generation antihistamines, patients should check with the doctor if they have:**

- Glaucoma
- Enlarged prostate
- Breathing problems
- Thyroid disease
- Heart disease
- High BP

***Before taking 2nd generation antihistamines, patients should check with the doctor if they have kidney or liver problems***

# Always Consult a Qualified Clinician

## Medications for Heartburn

- Antacids
  - Antacids neutralize the acid in the stomach
  - Antacids provide a fast, short term relief
- Acid reducing medications
  - H2 blockers (for example, Zantac, Pepsid)
  - Proton pump inhibitors (for example, Prilosec)

**Note: People with kidney disease must check with their doctor before taking any OTC meds for heartburn**

## Side effects are few but may include:

- Headaches
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Constipation

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## Medications for Constipation

- Bulk-forming laxatives (for example, Metamucil, FiberCon, Citrucel)
- Lubricants (such as glycerin suppositories)
- Stool softeners (for example, Colace)
- Saline laxatives (for example, Glycolax, MOM)
- Stimulant laxatives (for example, Dulcolax, Correctol)

## Possible Side Effects

- Nausea
- Cramping
- Gas
- Bloating
- Diarrhea

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**Does your patient take OTC medications for nausea? If so,**

- **Older adults can be more affected by side effects such as:**
  - Drowsiness
  - Dry mouth
- **Care should be taken if they also take sleeping pills, sedatives or muscle relaxants, OTC cold remedies and/or allergy medicines**

## Medications for Diarrhea

- Diarrhea is often caused by bacteria or parasites. Taking OTC antidiarrheal medications could cause some serious problems
- Common anti diarrhea medications include:
  - Bismuth subsalicylate (e.g. Kaopectate, Pepto-Bismol)
  - Loperamide

## **Most adults will have no side effects but older adults may experience**

- **Loperamide**
  - Constipation
  - Abdominal pain
  - Dizziness
  - Nausea
- **Bismuth subsalicylate**
  - Constipation
  - Blackened stools and/or tongue
  - Ringing sound in the ears

Patients should talk to the doctor before taking Anti diarrhea medications when also on:

- Antibiotics
- Antiviral meds for HIV
- Blood-thinning medicines
- Medicines for gout and/or medicines for arthritis
- Medicines for diabetes or pain relievers or cold medicines

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Kathie Smith, RN:  
Director of Quality Initiatives and State Liaison; Editor in Chief