

Top Ten Medicine Use Tips for Parents

Here are some helpful tips for you and your children's caregivers. For more information visit www.bemedwise.org and talkaboutrx.org.

- 1. When in doubt, ask first.** Your child's health is too important for guesswork. So any time you have a question about which OTC medicine is best for your child or how and when to give the medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist first. This is true for prescriptions medicines, too.
- 2. Know your child's weight so you can give the proper dose of the medicine as recommended on the product label.** Most pediatricians and pharmacists agree that a child's weight is the best way to determine the correct dose. For this reason, health professionals often recommend that parents keep an accurate scale in the house so they can check the child's weight before giving OTC medicines.
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- 4. Follow the directions on the label and package insert carefully.** Because OTCs and prescriptions are serious medicines that can do harm if taken incorrectly, always read the instructions before giving a child any product. By reading the OTC product label, you can be certain that you've selected the right product, understand the dosing instructions, and know what precautions to take or warning signs to watch for.
- 5. Use the specific dropper, dosing cup or other device that comes packaged with your child's medicine.** Because kitchen spoons and other household utensils vary in size and are not accurate enough to measure doses of medicines, using them may mean giving your child either too large or too small a dose of the medicine. The same thing can happen when you use a dosing device from another children's medicine.
- 6. If using multiple OTC medicines, you have to watch for both duplicate ingredients and usage.** *First*, check the active ingredient(s) used in each OTC medicine and make sure you're not giving your child more than one product with the same active ingredient without first checking with a healthcare professional. Because many cough and cold preparations contain the same active ingredient as pain relievers, it is possible to give a child two different products that contain the same active ingredient without realizing it.
Second, check for usage duplication. For example, two cold medicines may contain different active ingredients, but both of those ingredients act as fever reducers. That's usage duplication, and it should also be avoided. To play it safe, read the "Drug Facts" label and compare. Don't hesitate to ask your pediatrician or pharmacist for advice on product selection.
- 7. Give babies and children only those medicines that are especially formulated for their weight and age.** Cutting adult strength tablets in half or trying to estimate a child's dose of an adult-strength liquid can result in an accidental overdose. Similarly, giving older children liquid medicines that are especially formulated for babies can also lead to dosing errors.
- 8. Keep in mind that most OTC medicines are for temporary relief of minor symptoms.** If the condition persists or gets worse contact your pediatrician or other healthcare professional.
- 9. Don't give medicines in the dark.** This is often a problem because children get sick at night, and parents can make a mistake reading the dosing device if they can't see well.
- 10. Teach children that medicines are not candy and they should not touch, sniff, or taste them on their own.** Only let children take medicines from a responsible adult. Keep all medicines and household products out of children's reach.