

ASA **My Friend is Gone (433 words)**

My friend is gone. He died because he overdosed on products that contain acetaminophen. Before this, I wasn't sure what acetaminophen was. NOW I know – it's the active ingredient in a lot of over-the-counter and prescription medications that are used to treat headaches, colds, fevers, allergies and muscle aches.

Here's what happened. Joe – that's his name – was a star football player at his university. He was instrumental in winning the division championship. On a key play, he fell and broke his arm in two places. He was immediately rushed to the nearest hospital. After surgery to repair the multiple fractures, he was placed on prescription pain medicine that contained acetaminophen. He was still taking low doses of this medication 3 months after his fall. It was exam time, and Joe came down with a really bad cold and started taking cold medicine that also contained acetaminophen. A few days after he started taking the cold medicine, he started to feel really bad. He was throwing up, had stomach pain and couldn't eat. The student health center sent him to the hospital, and a week later, he was gone. He died of liver failure.

Acetaminophen is a common drug ingredient in over 600 OTC and prescription medicines that we use every day. On prescription medicine labels, it could be abbreviated as: *APAP*, *acet*, *acetamin* or *acetaminoph*. It's safe and effective when used as directed. According to *Medical News Today*, however, acetaminophen overdose causes more than 400 deaths due to acute liver failure each year, and the numbers appear to be on the rise. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 56% of acetaminophen overdose occurs when someone takes an OTC medicine and a prescription drug that contain acetaminophen at the same time – like Joe.

To put it simply, taking too much medicine that contains acetaminophen interrupts liver function, and like a domino effect, if the liver isn't functioning, we can die.

Who knew that too much acetaminophen could do this? Stay safe:

- 1. ALWAYS READ THE DRUG FACTS LABEL!** Learn to recognize acetaminophen in your medicines by reading the Active Ingredients section of the Drug Fact label, and look for acetaminophen abbreviations in your prescription medications.
- 2. USE AS DIRECTED.** Acetaminophen is safe and effective when used as directed. Taking more could cause an overdose and can lead to liver damage.
- 3. NEVER DOUBLE-DOSE.** Never take two medicines that contain acetaminophen at the same time.
- 4. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK.** Talk to your healthcare professional if you have acetaminophen questions.

Contact [organization's name – URL] at [phone number], [e-mail] for additional information.