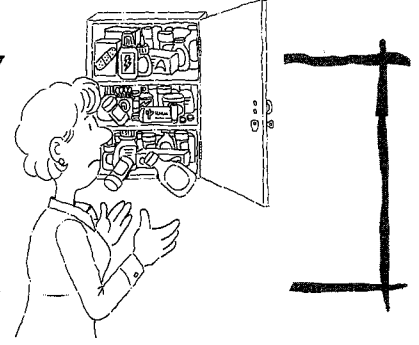


# A Guide to Your Child's Medicines



If you are confused or have questions about your child's medicines, you are not alone. The instructions that come with medicines can be hard to read and understand. For your child's health and safety, it's important that you understand this information. Read on to find out more about your child's medicines.

## Ask questions

Before you give your child any medicines, be sure you know how to use them. The following are questions you can ask your pediatrician or pharmacist:

- What is the name of the medicine?
- How will it help my child?
- Do I need to do anything *before* I give this medicine to my child?
- How much medicine do I give my child? When? For how long?
- Should my child avoid certain activities or not eat certain foods while using this medicine?
- Should my child not take other medicines, herbal products, or supplements?
- Are there any side effects?
- Is there anything special I need to know? (For example, is the dose larger than usual?)
- Is there any written information you can give me?
- What do I do if my child misses a dose?
- What do I do if I give my child too much?
- What if my child spits it out?
- Does it come in chewable tablets or liquid?
- Can you show me how to use this medicine?
- (If it's a prescription) Can this prescription be refilled? How many times?

## Prescription medicines

Medicines that only a doctor (and some other health professionals) can order are called *prescription medicines*. They may be generic or brand name. Generic medicines cost less than brand-name medicines but aren't always available. Sometimes it's more important to use the brand name. Ask your pediatrician what's best for your child.

The following are common prescription medicines for children:

- **Antibiotics.** Used for some bacterial infections like strep throat. Also used for some types of infections of the ear, sinus, urinary tract, and skin. Antibiotics usually don't cause problems but can have some side effects. Side effects may include skin rash, loose stools, upset stomach, staining of urine, or allergic reactions. Antibiotics don't work on viral infections like colds and the flu. The overuse of antibiotics has caused some bacteria to become resistant to them. This is why your pediatrician may not always treat a bacterial infection with an antibiotic.

## If your child goes to the hospital, do the following:

- Bring your child's health records.
- If your child is taking any medicines, including supplements, vitamins, herbal products, or home remedies, bring them to the hospital in their original containers. Write down when your child last took the medicines, and bring the note with you.
- Ask about any medicines your child is given while in the hospital. Keep a diary of what types of medicines are given to your child and when. Make sure to note any allergic reactions.

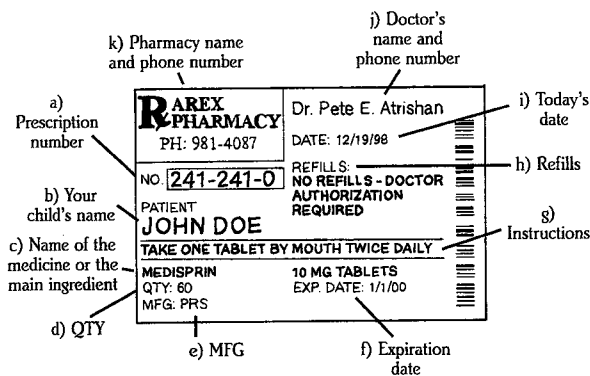
- **Ear drops.** Used for inflammation and infections of the ear canal. Side effects may include itching, feeling like the ears are clogged, or a "popping" sound in the ear.
- **Eyedrops or ointment.** Used for eye infections, allergies, or vision problems. Some children may get puffy eyes or say the drops hurt their eyes.
- **Inhalers.** Used to treat asthma and inflammation of the lungs. Your pediatrician will show you how to use an inhaler.
- **Nasal sprays.** Used to treat sinus problems or allergies. Certain types of sprays should only be used for a short time. Check with your pediatrician about how to use your nasal spray.
- **Skin products.** Used for skin infections, burns, parasites/mites, rashes, and acne. In general they are well tolerated, but your child's skin may get irritated. Also, special care is needed when using medicines that contain steroids or medicines for lice and scabies. They can have serious side effects if used too long.

*All medicines have the potential to cause allergic reactions. Remember to let your pediatrician know if your child has any side effects to any medicine. Side effects may include vomiting or hives or other skin rashes.*

## Read the label

The following information is found on a prescription label:

- a) **Prescription number.** Your pharmacy will ask for this number when you call in for a refill. You may also need this number when filling out insurance forms.
- b) **Your child's name.** Never give your child's medicine to another child even if the other child has similar symptoms.
- c) **Name of the medicine or the main ingredient.** Make sure this matches what your pediatrician told you. The strength of the medicine (for example, 10-mg tablets) may also be listed.



- d) **QTY.** "Quantity" or how much is in the package.
- e) **MFG.** "Manufacturer" or who makes the medicine.
- f) **Expiration date.** Throw away or flush medicines past this date.
- g) **Instructions.** The instructions tell you what condition or symptom is being treated and how your child needs to take the medicine. What your pediatrician tells you should match what is on the label. The following are some examples:

- **"Take full course."** Make sure your child takes the medicine for as long as directed, even if your child is feeling better.
- **"Take with food."** Give the medicine to your child after a meal. This is for medicines that work better when the stomach is full.
- **"Take 4 times a day."** Give the medicine to your child 4 times during the day—for example, at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and before bed. This is different than "take every 4 hours."
- **"Take every 4 hours."** Give the medicine to your child every 4 hours. This adds up to 6 times in a 24-hour period. For example, 6:00 am, 10:00 am, 2:00 pm, 6:00 pm, 10:00 pm, and 2:00 am. Most medicines don't have to be given at the exact time to work, but some do.
- **"Take as needed as symptoms persist."** Give the medicine to your child when needed.

- h) **Refills.** The label will show the number of refills you can get. If "no refills—Dr authorization required" is on the label, you will need to call your pediatrician.
- i) **Today's date.**
- j) **Doctor's name and phone number.**
- k) **Pharmacy name and phone number.**

The medicine may have an extra brightly colored safety label that says, for example, "Keep refrigerated," "Shake well before using," or "May cause drowsiness."

## Over-the-counter medicines

You can get *over-the-counter (OTC) medicines* without a doctor's order. This doesn't mean that OTCs are harmless. Like prescription medicines, OTCs can be very dangerous to a child if not taken the right way. You need to read and understand the instructions before giving OTCs to your child.

The following are common OTCs for children. Talk with your pediatrician before you give your child any medicine.

- **Acetaminophen and ibuprofen (fever reducer or pain reliever).** Can help your child feel better if your child's head or body aches or he has a fever. They also can help relieve minor pain from bangs and bumps or soreness from a shot. You don't need to treat a mild fever if your child is playing, drinking fluids, and generally acting well.

## A warning about aspirin

*Never* give aspirin or other salicylates (a type of medicine used to reduce pain or fever) to your child unless your pediatrician tells you it's safe. Aspirin has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious and sometimes fatal liver disorder, especially when given to children with the flu or chickenpox. For more information on Reye syndrome or a list of medicines that contain aspirin, contact the National Reye's Syndrome Foundation at 800/233-7393 or [www.reyessyndrome.org](http://www.reyessyndrome.org).

Acetaminophen and ibuprofen have few side effects and are quite safe if the right dose is given. They come in drops for infants, liquid (syrup or elixir) for toddlers, and chewable tablets for older children. Acetaminophen also comes in suppositories if your child is vomiting and can't keep down medicine taken by mouth. *Never* give a child aspirin (see "A warning about aspirin").

Keep in mind that infant drops are *stronger* (more concentrated) than syrup for toddlers. Some parents make the mistake of giving higher doses of infant drops to a toddler, thinking the drops are not as strong. Be sure the type you give your child is appropriate for his weight and age.

Ibuprofen tends to work better than acetaminophen in treating high fevers (103°F or higher). However, ibuprofen should only be given to children older than 6 months. *Never* give it to a child who is dehydrated or vomiting.

If your child has a kidney disease, asthma, an ulcer, or other chronic illness, ask your pediatrician if ibuprofen is safe for your child. Don't give your child ibuprofen or acetaminophen if he is taking any other pain reliever or fever reducer, unless your pediatrician says it's OK.

- **Antihistamines.** Can help your child feel better when he has a runny nose, itchy eyes, and sneezing due to allergies (but not colds). They also can help relieve itching from chickenpox or insect bites. They can even control hives or other allergic reactions. Antihistamines can make some children sleepy. Other children may become irritable, nervous, or restless. For that reason, don't give an antihistamine at bedtime unless you know your child will have no trouble sleeping.
- **Cough syrups.** Coughing helps clear the lungs of germs and mucus. A cough is "productive" if it sounds like mucus is coming up. This type of cough usually doesn't need to be treated. However, some coughs may be very dry and keep your child up at night. A humidifier may help loosen your child's cough. (Be sure to clean the humidifier often to prevent mold and bacteria buildup.) Some cough medicines, called *expectorants*, may also help loosen mucus. Cough *suppressants*, which help calm a cough, should be avoided as coughing helps clear the lungs. Current studies question the effectiveness and safety of cough suppressants, so you should check with your pediatrician before giving your child cough medicines or expectorants. Cough medicine isn't usually recommended to relieve cough caused by asthma.
- **Cold medicines.** Many cold medicines contain acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Always check the ingredients, especially if you're giving your child more than one medicine at the same time. If you're not careful, you could give your child too much of a certain kind of medicine, and it could lead to an overdose.