

The Drug Facts Label

The OTC Drug Facts label has a number of different sections, including active ingredients, purpose, uses, warnings, directions, other information, and inactive ingredients. Here are some definitions to keep in mind.

Active Ingredients

These are the substances that make a medicine work. It is especially important to pay attention to this section of the label if you are taking more than one medicine—whether OTC or prescription—to make sure you are not taking too much of the same active ingredient.

Warnings

There are times you should not take a medicine. The warnings section explains these times, and also tells you when a doctor or other healthcare professional needs to be consulted, possible side effects, and when to stop taking a product.

Directions

These are specific instructions on exactly how and when to take a medicine. They should be followed exactly because taking more of a medicine or for longer than labeled can be dangerous.

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Active Ingredients for a Healthy Lifestyle

This brochure is for informational purpose only. Always read medicine labels and use medicines safely, as directed. Talk to your healthcare professional about any health or medicine questions you have.

The CHPA Educational Foundation (housed at OTCsafety.org) is the nonprofit foundation of the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, and is dedicated to providing education to consumers on the appropriate and safe use of over-the-counter medicines and nutritional supplements.

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About over-the-counter medicines

OTCs & You

What are over-the-counter medicines?

Over-the-counter medicines—also called OTC medicines—are medicines which can be bought without a doctor's prescription.

What types of OTCs are there?

Many of the important medicines American families rely upon are available over the counter. There are more than 100,000 OTC medicines on the market today. These range from fever reducers to cold remedies, from stop-smoking therapies to heartburn relievers. Every OTC medicine on the shelves is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as safe and effective when used as directed.

What is the most important part of an OTC medicine?

Second only to the medication itself, the label is the most important part of an OTC medication. The Drug Facts label provides clear information about what is in the product, how to take it, when not to take it, and when to talk to a doctor or other healthcare professional. If you plan to take an OTC medicine, read the label first and follow its directions exactly.

7 Steps to using OTC medicines safely

- 1 Always read and follow the Drug Facts label.
- 2 Never take more than one medicine with the same active ingredient unless specifically told to do so by your doctor.
- 3 Choose products that treat only the symptoms you have so you take only those active ingredients you need.
- 4 Talk to your doctor if taking an OTC medicine becomes more than a temporary practice or if your symptoms do not go away.
- 5 Create a list of all the medicines you take and share it with your healthcare professional(s).
- 6 Tell your healthcare professional(s) about your full medical history and eating habits.
- 7 Bring any questions you have to a healthcare professional, such as a doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.