



FROM  
YOUR DOCTOR

# Taking over-the-counter drugs safely

Even though over-the-counter (OTC) medications are available without a prescription, they are still drugs. They should be taken with the same care as any other medicine. If they are not used properly, or if they are used along with certain other drugs, they can make you feel worse, not better.

Many more OTC medications are available today than ever before. They can treat everyday illnesses like headaches and fevers. But you need to know about the drugs you buy and learn how to use them wisely. Here are some tips to keep in mind.

**1 Ask a doctor or pharmacist about an OTC drug you are thinking about buying.**

- Is it a good choice for the illness you have?
- Are there side effects to watch for?
- Are there bad effects that might occur because of other medications you are taking? Or because of certain foods or drinks you are consuming? Or because of any chronic illness you have?

**2 Before you buy an OTC product,**

- Read the label carefully, including the information on safety and side effects.
- Read it again at home, before you take the medication.
- Be sure to look at the information sheet inside the package.

**3 Follow the label instructions carefully.**

- Make sure you take the right number of pills for each dose.
- Wait the right amount of time between doses.
- Don't double the dose, thinking that you will get better quicker.



**4 Pay attention to the warnings on the label.**

- For example, the label on your aspirin bottle warns not to use aspirin if you are also taking a drug for thinning the blood, diabetes, gout, or arthritis, unless a doctor says it's okay.
- Do not take any drug for longer than the time period shown on the label.
- If there is anything on the label you don't understand, call your doctor or pharmacist.

**5 Also call your doctor**

- If the symptoms of your illness last for more than a few days.
- If you are feeling any ill effects that might be related to the medication you're taking.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Pregnant women should not take any drug without first consulting their doctor. □