

The Dangers of Over-the-Counter Drugs

As reported on "The Dr. Oz Show," a nationwide survey asked pharmacists to name the most commonly misused non-prescription drugs. Here are some findings of that survey, as well as some important safety tips.

Multi-Symptom Cold & Flu Medications

These drugs treat only the symptoms of the common cold such as runny nose, congestion, fever, aches, and irritability. Most of these preparations contain several different medications in one dose to treat various symptoms. Because of this, you may be taking an active ingredient to treat a symptom that you do not have.

Acetaminophen

Acetaminophen (the active ingredient in Tylenol[®] and a number of pain and cold remedies) can be toxic to the liver, especially for those who are heavy alcohol users or who have liver problems. A good rule is to never take more than eight extra-strength tablets in 24 hours or 4,000 milligrams a day. If you see the abbreviation "APAP" on the label of an over-the-counter drug, it means that it contains acetaminophen.

Proton Pump Inhibitors

People assume they can take a daily dose of products that treat heartburn, such as Prilosec OTC[®], Prevacid 24HR[®] and Zegerid OTC[®]. The problem is that your body can become dependent on it, which can lead to rebound reflux when you stop. The best approach is to use such products only as directed for up to two weeks. If your heartburn continues, contact your healthcare professional.

Antihistamines

These drugs can help relieve itching, sneezing, runny nose, and watery eyes. The most common side effect of some antihistamines is sleepiness. Using Benadryl[®] (diphenhydramine) and driving a car could be as dangerous as driving drunk because it causes severe drowsiness. A better solution is to take a non-sedating antihistamine like Claritin[®] (loratadine) or Zyrtec[®] (cetirizine).

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs

This type of product includes ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin, used to reduce minor aches and pains, headaches, and fever. Using too much for too long can cause serious problems with the stomach lining. Try not to take anti-inflammatory drugs for more than 10 consecutive days.



To view the pharmacist survey episode of "The Dr. Oz Show" online, visit www.doctoroz.com/videos/dangers-otc-drugs-pt-1.

More information is available in the drugs area of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website at www.fda.gov.