

Nonprescription Medication Guidelines for Transplant Patients

About Nonprescription Medicines

Nonprescription (Over-The-Counter or OTC) are medicines that do not need a doctor's prescription for purchase. They have real effects and should be used with caution. This is true for patients who have received a transplant. This handout helps you use OTC medicines safely. It gives advice on which OTC medicines have the fewest side effects.

If you have any questions or concerns after reading this handout check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Remember to keep all medicines out of the reach of children and never share with others.

Before Choosing an OTC Medicine

Tell your doctor, nurse, and pharmacist if you:

- Are allergic to any medicine, either prescription or OTC.
- Are pregnant or intend to become pregnant while using this medicine.
- Are breast-feeding.
- Are taking any other prescription or OTC medicine or herbal products.
- Have other medical problems or have diabetes.

How to Use OTC Medicine

Read the package label. Take the dose on the package. Take it only as long as it is advised on the package. You may also ask your doctor how much to take and how long to take it. OTC products help relieve symptoms but are not cures. If your symptoms do not improve in 2 or 3 days, get worse, or if you have a fever or chills, contact your doctor.

We Suggest These OTC Medicines

Headache, Fever, and Body Aches

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can help relieve mild pain and fever. The maximum daily dose of acetaminophen is 4000 mg. If you have had a liver transplant, the dose should not be more than 2000 mg a day for 3 days in a row. Higher doses can harm your liver. Many products may contain acetaminophen. Check labels for the amount in each product.

Do not take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) because they can harm your kidney or interact with certain immunosuppressants. Common NSAIDs are:

- Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Midol® Cramp Formula)
- Naproxen (Aleve®)
- Ketoprofen (Orudis KT®)

Avoid taking aspirin unless your doctor prescribed it. Aspirin is in some other pain relievers. Such as Excedrin® or Bayer®.

Sneezing, Itching and Runny Nose

Antihistamines can help and safe to use most of the time.

Medicines that are considered non-drowsy:

- Loratadine (Claritin®)
- Cetirizine (Zyrtec®)
- Fexofenadine (Allegra®)
- Levocetirizine (Xyzal®)

Cromolyn (NasalCrom®) is another option to prevent allergy symptoms. It works best if you begin using it at least 1 week before you are in contact with possible allergens.

Medicines that can make you sleepy:

- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl®)
- Chlorpheniramine (Chlor-trimeton®)

These are best used at bedtime. Talk to your doctor before using an antihistamine if you have glaucoma, an enlarged prostate or trouble urinating.

Avoid combination cold, sinus, and flu products (TheraFlu®, Nyquil®). Accidental overdoses sometimes happen if you take these products. It is better to treat each symptom alone. If you must take one of these products read the label carefully. Get advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

Nasal and Sinus Congestion

Topical nasal sprays are the most helpful for congestion. Decongestants such as oxymetazoline (Afrin®) and phenylephrine (Neosynephrine®) should not be used for more than three days. Longer use can cause more congestion. Sodium chloride 9.9% (Ocean® spray) can be used safely long-term to keep your nasal passages moist.

SinuCleanse® is another product for allergies, nasal congestion, and swelling of the sinuses. It is a saline solution used as a nasal washing through a device or bottle.

Oral decongestants, such as pseudoephedrine (Sudafed®) and phenylephrine (Sudafed PE®) should be used with care because they can raise your blood pressure. Make sure to check the list in any cough or cold product for pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine.

Sore Throat

Most throat lozenges can be used safely. If you have diabetes, look for sugar-free products. Follow dosing advice carefully.

Chest Congestion

We suggest Guaifenesin (Robitussin®) for chest congestion. Coricidin® HBP Chest Congestion & Cough is another option that can make the cough more productive. Make sure to drink plenty of water to help loosen chest congestion.

Cough

We suggest Guaifenesin (Robitussin®) for a loose cough. For a dry cough, the cough suppressant dextromethorphan (Delsym®) or a guaifenesin/DM combination (Robitussin DM®) can be used. Coricidin® HBP Chest Congestion & Cough can be used safely in patients with high blood pressure. Vicks® VapoRub ointment and Vicks® VapoSteam are different types of products that can relieve a cough for a time. If you have diabetes, look for a product free of sugar and alcohol. Use other Coricidin® HBP products, such as Cold & Flu and Maximum Strength Flu with care as they contain regular or extra-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

Diarrhea

Loperamide (Imodium AD®) can be used for short-term treatment of diarrhea. It should not be used for longer than 48 hours. Pepto-Bismol® and Kaopectate® should be avoided because they may decrease the absorption of some immunosuppressive drugs. If your diarrhea is caused by an infection, is heavy, bloody, or lasts for more than a day you should contact your doctor.

Constipation

Some good products to try:

- Bulk-forming products: Metamucil[®], Fiberall[®]
- Stool softeners, such as docusate (Colace[®])
- Stimulants, such as bisacodyl (Dulcolax[®]), senna, or milk of magnesia (Phillip's[®]) hyperosmotics, such as polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX[®]) and combinations of a stool softener with a stimulant such as docusate with senna (Senokot-S[®]).

Long-term use of stimulant laxatives should be avoided because they may result in long-term diarrhea and changes in your electrolytes. If you remain constipated for more than 48 hours, please contact your doctor.

Stomach Upset

Stomach upset can be treated with:

- Calcium Carbonate (TUMS[®])
- Ranitidine (Zantac[®])
- Famotidine (Pepcid AC[®])
- Nizatidine (Axid AR[®])
- Omeprazole (Prilosec OTC[®])

If you are having loose stools, avoid products containing magnesium such as:

- Mylanta[®]
- Mygel[®]
- Maalox[®]
- Riopan[®]

These medicines can make diarrhea worse. They may also cause your magnesium levels to get too high if your kidneys are not working properly. Avoid cimetidine (Tagamet[®]) because it has many drug interactions.

Gas

We suggest Simethicone (Gas-X[®]) for gas symptoms. If you have diabetes, you should avoid using Beano[®]. The safety of Beano[®] in patients with diabetes has not been studied. Beano[®] is used to prevent, not treat, gas symptoms.

Insomnia

Diphenhydramine (Benadryl[®]) and doxylamine (Unisom[®]) can be used once in a while to help you fall asleep. Patients with glaucoma, enlarged prostate, or trouble urinating, should consider not using them. Melatonin is a dietary supplement that can be used at bedtime. It helps with your sleep cycles.

Dry Eyes and Eye Irritation

Artificial tears eye drops are advised for the symptoms of dry eyes and irritation. Ketotifen (Zaditor[®]) eye drops are another option to prevent eye irritation for 8-12 hours. They should not be used if your contact lens is causing the irritation.

Nausea and Vomiting

Meclizine (Antivert[®]) can be used to treat and prevent symptoms of nausea and vomiting. Please tell your doctor before taking this medicine. Other medicines you are taking may have the same side-effects and could make you sleepy.

Joint Pain

Capsaicin cream (Capzasin-P[®]) can be used as a topical pain reliever. It provides temporary relief of muscle, joint pain, and back pain. It numbs an area to the pain. The cream may cause a slight sense of burning in the area. This is due to the main ingredient being chili peppers. Wear gloves while applying capsaicin cream.

Skin Irritation, Insect Bites and Poison Ivy

Topical corticosteroids, such as hydrocortisone cream (Cortisone-10[®]), are advised for the treatment of:

- Skin irritation
- Insect bites
- Poison ivy.

Use of corticosteroids should be short term. Stop using the medicine if symptoms persist or worsen for more than 7 days. Contact your doctor for advice.

Precautions While Using OTC Products

Check the labels of all OTC and prescription medicines you take. Many OTC medicines sold for different uses have the same active ingredients. If you are taking multiple medicines, read labels carefully. This decreases the risk of an accidental overdose.

Many drugs contain sweeteners. Patients with diabetes should look for sugar-free products. In the ingredient list sugar may appear as:

- Sugar
- Honey
- Dextrose
- Fructose
- High fructose corn syrup
- Lactose
- sorbitol
- Mannitol

Calorie-free sweeteners include aspartame, acesulfame potassium, and saccharin.

Be careful not to take OTC medicine when on prescription drugs of the same type. Avoid products that have high alcohol content, such as Nyquil[®].

The use of herbal medicines is not advised. These products are not regulated by the FDA. They may contain toxins and filths. Many herbal medicines interact with your immunosuppressive medicines.

Do not use phenazopyridine (Azo-Standard[®]) to treat undiagnosed urinary tract pain. This product treats painful symptoms but not the source of the infection. Contact your doctor if you have urinary pain.

Do not use callus, corn or wart removers. Leave treatment of these problems and foot infections to your doctor or podiatrist.

Possible Side Effects of OTC Medicine

Possible side effects for nonprescription medicines are listed on the instruction sheet that comes with the product.

References:

Ellington T, Wipke-Tevis D, Messina C, Livesay T. The use of over-the-counter medication by transplant recipients: a guideline. *J Transplant Coordination*. 1999;9:17-24.

Raglin Quartetti H. FAQs on OTCs. *Diabetes Forecast*. 2004;57(2):68-71.

Roberts SS. 20 Questions. *Diabetes Forecast*. 2004;57(2):57-61.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6161

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OTC Quick Guide

Symptoms	Recommendation
Headaches, fever & body aches	Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
Sneezing, itching or runny nose	Loratadine (Claritin®), Cetirizine (Zyrtec®), Fexofenadine (Allegra®), levocetirizine (Xyzal®) Cromolyn (NasalCrom®)
Nasal & sinus congestion	Nasal sprays: Oxymetazoline (Afrin®), Phenylephrine (Neosynephrine®) Sodium chloride (Ocean®), (SinuCleanse®) Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed®)
Chest congestion	Guaifenesin (Robitussin®), Coricidin® HBP Chest Congestion & Cough
Productive cough	Guaifenesin (Robitussin®)
Dry cough	Dextromethorphan (Delsym®) Guaifenesin/Dextromethorphan (Robitussin DM®) Coricidin® HBP Chest Congestion & Cough
Sore throat	Lozenges
Constipation	Psyllium (Metamucil®), Docusate (Colace®), Docusate with senna (Senokot-S®), Bisacodyl (Dulcolax®) Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®), Senna
Diarrhea	Loperamide (Imodium AD®)
Insomnia	Diphenhydramine (Benadryl®), Doxylamine (Unisom®) Melatonin
Stomach upset	Calcium carbonate (TUMS®)
Heartburn	Ranitidine (Zantac®) Famotidine (Pepcid AC®) Nizatidine (Axid®) Omeprazole (Prilosec OTC®)
Gas	Simethicone (Gas-X®)
Dry eyes and eye irritation	Artificial Tears, Ketotifen (Zaditor®)
Nausea & vomiting	Meclizine (Antivert®)
Joint pain	Capsaicin cream (Capzasin-P®)
Skin irritation, insect bites, poison ivy	Hydrocortisone (Cortisone-10®)

Common brand names are listed in parenthesis. Generic products are available for some products and may be used instead of the brand name product. Read labels carefully to make sure you are getting the same active ingredient.