



# ‘Over-the-counter’ Pain Relievers: *Too much of a good thing?*

A message for teens from the Blue Ridge Poison Center about Tylenol®, Aspirin, Advil®, & other pain relievers.



**MEDICINES FOR PAIN** like Tylenol®, Aspirin, Midol®, and Advil® are inexpensive and easy to buy. But beware! Just because anyone, even teens, can buy

them “over the counter” (without a prescription) doesn’t mean they are safe for everyone and cannot hurt you. Pain relievers can be dangerous to your health if used incorrectly. According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, *more calls to poison centers in the U.S. are about over-the-counter pain relievers than any other substance.*

### HOW CAN PAIN RELIEVERS HURT YOU?

When used correctly, over the counter (OTC) pain relievers help relieve minor pain, fever, and swelling from injuries, headaches, colds & flu, cramps and other conditions. Some people wrongly assume that twice as much medicine will give twice the relief. But when you take more than the dose recommended by the label or by your doctor, your body can’t get rid of the medicine fast enough. It can build up and damage your organs...*sometimes permanently.*

Too much OTC pain reliever medicine can also damage the protective lining of your stomach, creating pain, nausea, or vomiting. Too much of some OTC medicines can prevent your blood from clotting normally, which could lead to bleeding inside your body. Other problems may include dizziness, headache, or ringing in the ears.

### WHAT IS AN “ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE”

If you’re taking OTC pain relievers *and* cold and flu products, such as decongestants, antihistamines, or cough suppressants you may be taking the same drug, or ‘active ingredient,’ more than once! This can lead to an unintentional overdose.

For example, the following products all contain the active ingredient *acetaminophen*:

- Tylenol®
- Thera-flu®
- Alka-seltzer Plus®

If you took all three of them together, you would be taking a dangerous amount of acetaminophen, which could damage your liver.

Other OTC pain reliever active ingredients, and some brand names of products that contain them, include:

*Acetylsalicylic acid*..... Aspirin, Anacin®, Bayer®, Bufferin®, Excedrin®, etc.

*Ibuprofen*..... Motrin®, Midol®, Advil®, etc.

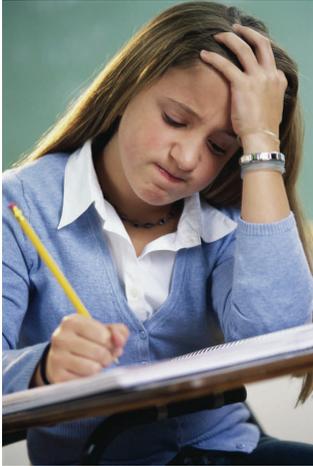
*Naproxen*..... Aleve®, Naprosyn®, etc.

Many cold, flu, and allergy medicines contain the active ingredients above, as well as other active ingredients such as *chlorpheniramine, pseudoephedrine, guaifenesin, or dextromethorphan.* These active ingredients are all drugs that can cause harm if you take too much!



## HOW DO LABELS PROTECT US?

Labels list all the active ingredients in a product. Labels also tell you how much of each active ingredient is safe to take, how much is in one dose, and other safety information. **Make it a habit: read the label** on every OTC product you take, and follow the instructions unless advised otherwise by your doctor.

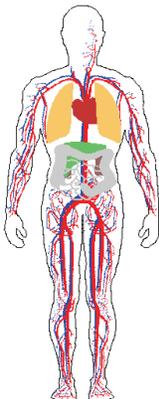


## BE POISON SMART ABOUT PAIN RELIEVERS!

- ◆ Don't make a mistake! Check the label each time you use a product.
- ◆ Follow the dose instructions exactly, unless advised otherwise by your doctor. Remember: more is *not* better.
- ◆ Don't combine doses of the same active ingredient found in more than one product unless otherwise advised by your doctor.

If you have any questions or problems, ask your doctor, pharmacist, your school nurse, or call the Blue Ridge Poison Center TOLL FREE, day or night, for confidential advice:  
1-800-222-1222.

Cell users call 1-800-451-1428



For a copy of this brochure, please contact:

Educator  
Blue Ridge Poison Center  
UVA Health System  
Box 800-774  
Charlottesville, VA 22908

1-434-982-4386

For more information on poison prevention and poison safety, please call the number above or visit our website:

<https://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/brpc/>