

How to Read an OTC Drug Label

You don't need a prescription to buy Over-the-counter (OTC) medicine. But like prescription drugs, OTC medicines can also cause unwanted and sometimes dangerous side effects. Before you buy an OTC medicine, it's important to read and thoroughly understand the information on the drug label. Use the following as a guide. If you have questions about a medicine, ask your pharmacist or family doctor.

1. **Active Ingredient.** The active ingredient is the chemical compound in the medicine that works to relieve your symptoms. It is always the first item on the label. There may be more than one active ingredient in a product. The label will clearly show this.
2. **Uses.** This section lists the symptoms the medicine is meant to treat. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must approve these uses. Uses are sometimes referred to as "indications."
3. **Warnings.** This safety information will tell you what other medicines, foods or situations (such as driving) to avoid while taking this medicine.
4. **Directions.** Information about how much medicine you should take and how often you should take it will be listed here.
5. **Other Information.** Any other important information, such as how to store the product, will be listed here.
6. **Inactive Ingredients.** An inactive ingredient is a chemical compound in the medicine that isn't meant to treat a symptom. Inactive ingredients can include preservatives, binding agents and food coloring. This section is especially important for people who know they have allergies to food coloring or other chemicals.
7. **Questions or Comments.** A toll-free number is provided to address any questions or comments you may have about the medicine.

Source: American Association of Family Practitioners

Acetaminophen may cause hepatic toxicity in some patients. Patients should be cautioned not to exceed the maximum daily dose of 4 g/day from all sources. Chronic heavy alcohol abusers may be at increased risk of hepatotoxicity from excessive acetaminophen use, although reports of this event are rare.

Source: American Pharmacists Association