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OTC Medication and Kids

Giving drugstore medications to your child is no big deal, right? Well, it shouldn't be... as long as you use them the right way. But just because a medication is sold over the counter doesn't mean it comes with a risk-free guarantee.

If you're like many parents, though, there's probably been a time or two when you've fudged the dose or lost track of how much you've given. Maybe you lucked out and nothing horrible happened. That's great, but why tempt fate?

If your child has ever had a bad reaction to an over-the-counter (OTC) medication, stop giving the medication right away. Tell the doctor and pharmacy staff about it. Keep a record of its name, dosage directions, the illness it was used for, and the side effects it caused.

How can you lower your child's risk? For starters, remember to keep all medications out of reach of children. Also, make sure you're using the right product for your child's symptoms. We can advise you. Describe symptoms to your child's doctor or our pharmacy staff. Also, tell us your child's age, weight, medical conditions, and any medications your child is taking now or has in the past.

Here are some general guidelines that may also help.

Which ones?

- Don't give your child any medications that are intended for infants or adults
- Only use products that treat the symptoms your child has.
- Don't ever give OTC medicine to children to make them sleepy.
- Give acetaminophen for pain relief.
- Avoid ibuprofen if your child is younger than 6 months old
- Do not give decongestants, cough medicines, and cold medicines if your child is younger than age four. These medicines have caused serious side effects — even deaths — in this age group. For example, a recent study showed that Vicks VapoRub may cause inflammation of airways in infants and toddlers.
- Don't give aspirin to children under age 18. Children and teens are at risk for a reaction to aspirin that can cause permanent brain injury!

How much?

Getting the right dose is very important. Read labels and follow directions closely. Compare medications if you're giving your child more than one. Cold and cough medications, for example, may have some of the same ingredients. Or, they may have ingredients that produce the same results, such as lowering fever. If you're not careful, you could double a dose. Did you know that an overdose of acetaminophen could lead to permanent liver damage? No small matter.

Here are some other tips for getting the right dosage:

- Use your child's weight, not age, to determine dosage. Don't guess, weigh your child.
- Use the measuring device that came with the product
- Don't use kitchen spoons. They come in different sizes.
- If you're using a measuring cup, put it on a flat surface, then pour.
- Bring us your measuring devices and we can show you the difference between a mL and a teaspoon.
- Remember: more is not better — be precise with measurements.

When?

Do you have a hard time keeping track of how much medicine you've given your child? Try keeping a simple log or write it on a kitchen calendar. In general, "every six hours" means that you give the medicine to your child four times a day. For example, give the medicine at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bedtime. You don't need to wake your child to give medicine.

SOURCES

- [HealthDay Web site](#). "Vicks VapoRub Linked to Infant Breathing Problems."
- [CHPA Educational Foundation Web site](#).
- [American Academy of Family Physicians](#). "OTC Medicines and How They Work."
- [HealthAtoZ Web site](#). "Giving Over-the-Counter Medicine to Kids."



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