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CCM NEWSLETTER

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Over the Counter (OTC) Pain Relief

How many of you have roamed the aisles of your local grocery store or pharmacy trying to make sense of the endless options of over the counter pain medications and remedies? Whenever we can, Dr. Duchicela and I like to browse these aisles as well- just to see what is out there- and we are astounded by the array of choices and inventive marketing of medication combinations that are presented. Don't feel bad if you suffer from OTC paralysis. It's a real thing.

This month, I want to give you some basic and simple knowledge so you can confidently walk down those aisles and get what you need to feel better.

There are 3 main players when it comes to OTC pain medications:

- *Acetaminophen*
- *Ibuprofen*
- *Naproxen*

Some of these names may not look familiar to you, but you know them by their brand names. Almost all the OTC pain medications will contain these ingredients or some sort of combination of these ingredients. It's important to know these names because you will need to look for them in the "active ingredient" section of the packaging.

Acetaminophen

Common Name: *Tylenol*

Common uses: Fever-reducer, pain reliever

Available Forms: Liquid, tablet, capsules (gel/liquid)

Plain Tylenol is a great first choice for pain relief! It's the most commonly used OTC medication for many reasons:

- 1) You can take it on an empty stomach.
- 2) It's safe for people with kidney disease, high blood pressure or gastric ulcers.
- 3) Widely available and well tolerated.

Adult formulations of acetaminophen come in a couple different dosages. You'll find this information on the "active ingredients" section of the packaging.

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|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Regular Strength- 325 mg | Extended Release- 650 mg |
| Extra Strength- 500 mg | |
| Arthritis Pain- 650 mg | |

Picking the right dosage comes down to simple math. *The maximum dose of acetaminophen we recommend for patients is 3000mg per day.* Once you know the maximum dose per day, you can figure out how often you want to be taking medicine. To make things easy for patients, I recommend buying the Extra Strength (500mg) formulation and taking 2 of those pills (for a total of 1000mg). You can take this dosage up to 3 times a day or every 8 hours.

Drug companies will try to package and repackage acetaminophen to appeal to specific ailments. Did you know that Tylenol Arthritis is exactly the same as Tylenol 8-hour Muscle Aches and Pain? They both are 650mg tablets! This is where knowing the generic name and the maximum dosage per day is key.

You should also be aware of the multitude of combination medications on the market. I'm looking at you Tylenol Cold & Flu, Sinus, Congestion, Headache etc. Many of these combination meds can have up to 4 or 5 ingredients!



Acetaminophen 325 mg in each caplet
 Dextromethorphan HBr 10 mg in each caplet
 Guaifenesin 200 mg in each caplet
 Phenylephrine HCl 5 mg in each caplet

Let's break this one down →

- Acetaminophen (for pain and/or fever)
- Dextromethorphan (suppresses coughing)
- Guaifenesin (expectorant- thins out mucus so you can cough it out)
- Phenylephrine (Nasal Decongestant)

Whew! A lot is going on in that one capsule! Did anyone catch that the makers of this product added a medication that reduces coughing AND promotes coughing? That seems weird right?

Additionally, phenylephrine is a medication that is not recommended routinely for individuals with heart disease, high blood pressure, enlarged prostate etc. By adding phenylephrine to this Tylenol formulation, it is removing the safety profile that benefits many patients.

Bottom Line: Avoid Combination OTC products. It will contain some of what you need and a lot of what you don't. Stick with plain acetaminophen and ask your doctor about other medications for your specific symptoms.

One last combination to mention and avoid: **TYLENOL PM or TYLENOL SLEEP**

This is basically acetaminophen + diphenhydramine.

Diphenhydramine is what most people know as Benadryl. It makes you sleepy, so your pain or cold and flu symptoms don't wake you up as much as they normally would. Diphenhydramine has earned itself a place on the "Beer's List". Patients with prostate and urination issues or dementia should avoid this drug.

The Beer's List is a list of medications that have been proven to be potentially harmful for individuals over the age of 65.

Ibuprofen

Common Name: Advil or Motrin

Common Uses: Pain relief, reduce fever, reduce inflammation

Available Forms: Liquid, tablets, capsules (gel/ liquid)

Ibuprofen is another widely used OTC medication, and while it is safe and effective for many people, here are some things to consider:

- 1.) Irritates the stomach, so you should take it with a meal or light snack. Avoid it if you have a history of stomach ulcers.
- 2.) Use with caution in people with *heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, or on blood thinners*.
- 3.) Avoid if also using other pain medication like celecoxib or other 'Cox-2 inhibitors'.

Fortunately, ibuprofen comes in similar dosages across the brands. You will usually see the active ingredient in both Motrin and Advil as **'ibuprofen 200mg'**.

The maximum dosage for ibuprofen is 3200 mg per day. Ideally you should use the smallest dose possible to get relief from your symptoms, therefore I recommend no more than 1200mg per day.

Similar to the acetaminophen products, beware of the ibuprofen + sleep aid. Please try to avoid these medication combinations as much as possible.

Naproxen

Common Name: Aleve

Common Uses: Pain relief and Reduces Inflammation

Available Forms: Tablets, capsules (gel/liquid)

Naproxen is very similar to Ibuprofen in that it is also an anti-inflammatory pain medication and **needs to be taken with food, milk or an antacid. Do NOT take ibuprofen and naproxen together.**

Naproxen is a long-acting medication and is taken only twice a day. **Ibuprofen is a short-acting** medication. It rapidly starts to work, but will wear off sooner and that's why you have to take ibuprofen more times during the day than naproxen.

Most naproxen formulations come in dosages of 220 mg per pill. The recommended max dosage for naproxen is 1000 mg per day.

I'm going to throw in a bonus OTC medication that is commonly used and very effective.

Excedrin

This brand name medication is actually a combination of:

- Acetaminophen 250 mg
- Aspirin 250 mg (another anti-inflammatory)
- Caffeine 65 mg (enhances the effect of acetaminophen and aspirin)

This medication is marketed more towards individuals with migraines or headaches, but can be very effective for pain relief as well.

Aspirin is in the same family as ibuprofen- so you will need to have something in your stomach when you take Excedrin.

Now that you know the names of the active ingredients and the safe amount you can take in a day, you should feel a little more confident next time you are reaching for an OTC medication to help with any aches or pains. Refer back to this newsletter or talk with your physician at your next appointment about which medication is most appropriate for you.

OTC Rapid Recommendations

- **Acetaminophen = Tylenol**
- Do not take more than 3000 mg of acetaminophen per day (easy dosing = 2 x 500mg pills every 8 hours)
- You can take acetaminophen on an empty stomach
- *Acetaminophen is your safest OTC option*

- **Ibuprofen = Advil or Motrin**
- Don't take more than 1200 mg of ibuprofen per day
- Always take ibuprofen with food or milk
- Will affect your blood pressure, stomach, and kidneys

- **Naproxen = Aleve**
- Naproxen is like ibuprofen but longer lasting. Only take twice daily
- Take naproxen with food or milk
- Maximum dosage of naproxen is 1000 mg per day
- Will affect your blood pressure, stomach, and kidneys

- **Excedrin = acetaminophen + aspirin + caffeine**
- **Don't waste \$\$ on combination "cold + flu" type medications. Too many ingredients that may be harmful and counteract each other.**
- **AVOID OTC pain and sleep aids (Tylenol PM, Advil PM etc.) The potential side effects are not worth the "good night's sleep"**



After reviewing your medical record, you are on the following over-the-counter (OTC) medications:

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If you have any questions about the medications you are taking, please feel free to call the clinic at (979) 725-8545 to schedule your next appointment.

Jorge Duchicela, M.D.



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