

Kids Aren't Just Small Adults -- Medicines, Children, and the Care Every Child Deserves

[\(PDF version - 801KB\) \(\)](#)

Use care when giving any medicine to an infant or a child. Even over-the-counter (OTC) medicines that you buy are serious medicines. The following is advice for giving OTC medicine to your child, from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the makers of OTC medicines:

1. **Always read and follow the Drug Facts label on your OTC medicine.** This is important for choosing and safely using all OTC medicines. Read the label every time, before you give the medicine. Be sure you clearly understand how much medicine to give and when the medicine can be taken again.
2. **Know the “active ingredient” in your child’s medicine.** This is what makes the medicine work and is always listed at the top of the Drug Facts label. Sometimes an active ingredient can treat more than one medical condition. For that reason, the same active ingredient can be found in many different medicines that are used to treat different symptoms. For example, a medicine for a cold and a medicine for a headache could each contain the same active ingredient. So, if you’re treating a cold and a headache with two medicines and both have the same active ingredient, you could be giving twotimes the normal dose. If you’re confused about your child’s medicines, check with a doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.
3. **Give the right medicine, in the right amount, to your child.** Not all medicines are right for an infant or a child. Medicines with the same brand name can be sold in many different strengths, such as infant, children, and adult formulas. The amount and directions are also different for children of different ages or weights. Always use the right medicine and follow the directions exactly. Never use more medicine than directed, even if your child seems sicker than the last time.
4. **Talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse to find out what mixes well and what doesn’t.** Medicines, vitamins, supplements, foods, and beverages don’t always mix well with each other. Your healthcare professional can help.
5. **Use the dosing tool that comes with the medicine, such as a dropper or a dosing cup.** A different dosing tool, or a kitchen spoon, could hold the wrong amount of medicine.
6. **Know the difference between a tablespoon (tbsp.) and a teaspoon (tsp.)** Do not confuse them! A tablespoon holds three times as much medicine as a

teaspoon. On measuring tools, a teaspoon (tsp.) is equal to “5 cc” or “5 mL.”

7. **Know your child’s weight.** Directions on some OTC medicines are based on weight. Never guess the amount of medicine to give to your child or try to figure it out from the adult dose instructions. If a dose is not listed for your child’s age or weight, call your doctor or other members of your healthcare team.
8. **Prevent a poison emergency by always using a child-resistant cap.** Re-lock the cap after each use. Be especially careful with any products that contain iron; they are the leading cause of poisoning deaths in young children.
9. **Store all medicines in a safe place.** Today’s medicines are tasty, colorful, and many can be chewed. Kids may think that these products are candy. To prevent an overdose or poisoning emergency, store all medicines and vitamins in a safe place out of your child’s (and even your pet’s) sight and reach. If your child takes too much, call the Poison Center Hotline at **1-800-222-1222** (open 24 hours every day, 7 days a week) or call 9-1-1.
10. **Check the medicine three times.** First, check the outside packaging for such things as cuts, slices, or tears. Second, once you are at home, check the label on the inside package to be sure you have the right medicine. Make sure the lid and seal are not broken. Third, check the color, shape, size, and smell of the medicine. If you notice anything different or unusual, talk to a pharmacist or another healthcare professional.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (<http://www.fda.gov/>)

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Resources for You

- [Educational Resources: Understanding Over-the-Counter Medicine \(/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/ucm277845.htm\)](/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/ucm277845.htm)
- [Tips For Parents about the safe use of over-the-counter \(OTC\) medicine \(/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/TipsForParents/default.htm\)](/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/TipsForParents/default.htm)

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