HELPING SOMEONE MANAGE PAIN MEDICATIONS

What Caregivers Need to Know

U.S. PAIN FOUNDATION



Helping someone manage pain medications can involve a lot of moving pieces. From prescriptions and OTC pain relievers to cold, flu, and allergy products, keeping track of ingredients, doses, and timing isn't always easy. **Here are five things caregivers and care partners should know.**

1

DIFFERENT MEDICATIONS CAN CONTAIN THE SAME INGREDIENT

A prescription medication, OTC pain reliever, and cold, flu, or allergy product may contain overlapping active ingredients.

For example, **acetaminophen** is found in Tylenol, but it's also included in certain prescription pain medications, multi-symptom cold, flu, or allergy products, and combination OTC products for specific types of pain. Taking more than one product with acetaminophen can lead to accidentally taking too much of that ingredient.

What you can do: Check the active ingredients in every medication, rather than just reading the brand names.

2

NOT ALL PAIN RELIEVERS CAN BE COMBINED

Ibuprofen (Advil), **naproxen sodium** (Aleve), **aspirin**, **magnesium salicylate** (Doan's), and **diclofenac sodium** (Voltaren) are all NSAIDs.

Using more than one NSAID can increase the risk of serious complications such as stomach bleeding and kidney, liver, or heart problems. Some medications may be appropriate to use together under medical guidance, but others should not be combined.

What you can do: Ask a pharmacist or healthcare provider to review the complete medication list before adding a new OTC product. Don't stop prescribed low-dose aspirin without medical guidance.

3

KEEP EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE

If several family members or caregivers help with medications for the person you're caring for, confusion about timing or doses can happen.

Having one shared medication list and a consistent way to record doses can help reduce the risk of accidentally giving a medication twice.

What you can do: Agree on one tracking method, update it when medications change, and make sure everyone involved knows where to find it.

4 KNOW WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Different OTC pain relievers require additional caution or may need to be avoided for people with certain health conditions, including kidney disease, liver disease, heart conditions, and bleeding disorders. Medications can also interact with prescriptions, supplements, and other treatments.

What you can do: Keep an updated list of medications and health conditions to share with pharmacists and healthcare providers. Ask what side effects require a call and which symptoms require urgent care.

5 PAY ATTENTION TO WHETHER THE MEDICATION IS HELPING

Managing medications isn't only about making sure they're taken correctly.

It's also important to notice whether the treatment is providing enough relief. Is pain still interfering with sleep, movement, or everyday activities? Is relief wearing off too soon? Are side effects becoming a problem?

What you can do: Help keep track of treatment effectiveness, and encourage a conversation with the healthcare provider when the current plan isn't meeting the person's needs.



FIVE QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

Before starting or changing an OTC medication, consider asking:

1. Can this medication be safely used with everything else they're taking?
2. Is there a plan for organizing and tracking doses, timing, and ingredients?
3. Do their health conditions affect which OTC medications are appropriate?
4. What side effects should we watch for, and when should we seek help?
5. What should we do if their pain isn't adequately controlled?

REMEMBER

Helping someone manage pain medications can be complicated, and you don't have to have every answer.

Your pharmacist and healthcare team can help you understand medication options, potential interactions, and what to do when questions come up.

Whenever possible, include the person living with pain in decisions about their care, respecting their preferences and independence.

Clear information and communication can make medication management easier for everyone involved.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TAKING. KNOW WHAT TO ASK. KNOW YOUR OPTIONS FOR PAIN RELIEF.

This content is intended for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Always follow the Drug Facts label and consult your healthcare provider or pharmacist with questions about medication use.