KNOW YOUR OTC PAIN RELIEVERS

Understand the Options, What to Watch For, and What to Ask

U.S. PAIN FOUNDATION



KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR OTCS

Tylenol. Advil. Aleve. Doan's. Voltaren.

You may recognize these names, but do you know what makes them different?

Over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers can help with certain types of pain, but they don't all work the same way. And if you're living with chronic pain, understanding your options is especially important.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

Acetaminophen helps relieve pain and fever but doesn't significantly reduce inflammation.
NSAIDs, or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, help relieve pain and fever, and also reduce inflammation.
Topical pain relievers are applied directly to the skin for local pain relief.

COMPARING COMMON OTC PAIN RELIEVERS

ACTIVE INGREDIENT	COMMON BRANDS	WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW
Acetaminophen	**Tylenol**	Relieves pain and fever, but not inflammation. Too much can cause serious liver damage.
Ibuprofen (NSAID)	**Advil, Motrin**	Relieves pain, fever, and inflammation. Can increase risk of stomach bleeding, kidney problems, heart attack, and stroke.
Naproxen sodium (NSAID)	**Aleve**	Relieves pain, fever, and inflammation; generally lasts longer than ibuprofen. Similar risks as ibuprofen but higher GI concerns and fewer heart problems.
Magnesium salicylate (NSAID)	**Doan's**	Used for relief of back, muscle, or joint pain and swelling. Can increase risk of stomach bleeding and kidney problems, and ringing in the ears at higher doses.
Aspirin (NSAID)	**Bayer Aspirin**	Relieves pain, fever, and inflammation. Can increase stomach and brain bleeding risks.
Diclofenac sodium gel (topical NSAID)	**Voltaren Arthritis Pain**	Applied to certain joints for arthritis pain. Carries the same NSAID precautions but possesses lower risk than oral OTC NSAIDs.
Lidocaine (topical anesthetic)	**Aspercreme Lidocaine, Icy Hot Lidocaine, Tylenol Precise***	Gels, creams, or patches that temporarily numb localized areas to help relieve pain. Risks include skin reactions and nervous system or heart problems with overuse.
Menthol, camphor, methyl salicylate, or capsaicin (topical analgesics)	**Biofreeze, Icy Hot, Salonpas, Tylenol Precise*, Capzasin**	Gels, creams, or patches that provide cooling or warming sensations to relieve minor aches and pains. Can cause skin reactions.

***Tylenol Precise offers various topical products with different active ingredients, including lidocaine, menthol, and camphor. Tylenol Precise products do not contain acetaminophen. Always check the specific product's Drug Facts label.**



WHAT ABOUT COMBINATION PAIN RELIEVERS?

Some OTC products combine two or more active ingredients in one medication. Examples include:

- **Acetaminophen + ibuprofen** *(e.g., Advil Dual Action)*
- **Acetaminophen + naproxen sodium** *(Tylenol with Naproxen)**
- **Acetaminophen + aspirin + caffeine** *(e.g., Excedrin Migraine)*

What to Know: Combination products have their own dosing instructions and precautions.

Brand names are examples, not endorsements.
**(FDA-approved; retail availability to be confirmed)*



KNOW BEFORE YOU COMBINE

- **Ingredients:** Do two products contain the same active ingredient?
- **Interactions:** Could an OTC medication interfere with your prescriptions or other treatments?
- **Timing:** When did you last take each medication?

Don't combine NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen and naproxen, unless directed by a healthcare professional. If you take prescribed aspirin, ask before adding another NSAID. Don't stop prescribed aspirin on your own.

KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR OTHER OTCS

Some **cold**, **flu**, **allergy**, **sinus**, or **sleep** products are created to treat multiple symptoms and contain pain relievers, including acetaminophen or NSAIDs.



Read the active ingredients and compare them with medications you're already taking for pain.

YOUR HEALTH HISTORY MATTERS

Having certain conditions may require additional caution with some medications, including if you're pregnant, take blood thinners or multiple medications, or have kidney or liver disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, or bleeding conditions.

Talk with your pharmacist or healthcare provider about what is safe for you.



STILL IN PAIN?

Don't take more than directed. Talk with your healthcare provider about other treatment options.

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.