

Over-the-Counter Drugs: Reducing the Risks of Self-Prescribing



Over-the-counter (OTC) drugs are widely advertised in magazines and on TV and are consumed by millions of people. Generally less potent than prescription drugs, they can be taken without the authorization of a doctor. But before purchasing an over-the-counter remedy, ask yourself:

- Am I trying to cover up symptoms that need to be evaluated by a doctor?
- Will continued use cause new problems (dependency on laxatives or sleeping pills, for example)?
- Are there unwanted side effects from these drugs (for example, increased blood pressure, dizziness, headaches, rashes)?
- Do I already have a similar product at home?

Often, reading the package labels—or looking up the name of the drug at the Web site: www.medlineplus.gov, can help you answer these questions. For information on over-the-counter medicine labels, contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at 1.888.INFO.FDA (463.6332) or www.fda.gov.

Keep in mind, too, that when taken in large quantities, an OTC drug might equal the dose of a medicine that is available only by prescription.

If there is any uncertainty in your mind whether or not a particular OTC medication will help or harm you, call and check with your doctor before you purchase it.