

# Checklist for Choosing Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicine for Children

## Information I need before going to the store:

- ☐ Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ (pounds) Age: \_\_\_\_\_ (month or years)
- ☐ Problem(s) or symptom(s) you want to treat: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Allergies or other health problems: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Any medicine (s)he used for the problem(s) before or medicine recommended by the doctor: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other medicines (OTC and prescription), vitamins, and other dietary supplements (s)he is using: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_ Pharmacy: \_\_\_\_\_

## At the store:

- ☐ Find the group of medicines that treats the problem(s) or symptom(s) (s)he has (such as pain, fever, or allergy).
- ☐ Find the form of medicine (such as infant drops, liquid, or chewable tablets) that is best for her/him.
- ☐ Read the “*Drug Facts*” label carefully on each medicine package.

### *Drug Facts*

#### *Active ingredients/Purposes*

- ☐ Make sure the *Active Ingredients* aren't the same as those in another medicine (s)he is already using.
- ☐ If the medicine contains more than one *Active Ingredient*, read the *Purposes* of each active ingredient to make sure all of the active ingredients are needed for the problem(s) or symptom(s) you want to treat.

#### *Uses*

- ☐ Find medicine that **treats only** the problem(s) or symptom(s) (s)he has.

#### *Warnings*

- ☐ Is there any reason this medicine shouldn't be used?
- ☐ Is there any reason to talk to a doctor or pharmacist before using this medicine?

#### *Directions*

- ☐ Find the correct dose on the package for her/his weight and age.
- ☐ Make sure liquid medicine comes with a measuring tool (such as dropper, syringe, or dosing cup). If not, ask for one at the pharmacy. Spoons made for eating and cooking may give the wrong dose and shouldn't be used.

- ☐ Check with the doctor or pharmacist to be sure the new medicine can be used with her/his other medicines.

## The *Drug Facts* label

In the United States, each OTC medicine has a *Drug Facts* label. The *Drug Facts* label is there to help you choose the right OTC medicine and use it safely. All medicines, even OTC medicines, can cause side effects (unwanted or unexpected effects). But if the directions on the label are followed, the chance of side effects can be lowered. These are the sections of the *Drug Facts* label:

The *Active ingredients/Purposes* section tells you the part of the medicine that makes it work (active ingredient), what it does (purpose), and how much of each active ingredient is in each unit (such as pill, capsule, or teaspoon). Choose a medicine that treats only the problem(s) you want to treat. Extra medicine won't help, and could cause harmful or unwanted side effects.

The *Uses* section tells you the problems the medicine will treat. The problem(s) you want to treat should match at least one of the *Uses*.

The *Warnings* section tells you:

- When to talk to a doctor first.
- How the medicine might make a person feel.
- When the medicine shouldn't be used.
- Things that shouldn't be done while using the medicine.
- When to stop using the medicine.
- To check with a doctor before using medicine if the person is pregnant or breastfeeding.
- To keep medicines away from children.

The *Directions* section tells you how to use the medicine safely:

- How much to use. (see ❖ Child's weight and age, below)
- How to use it.
- How often to use it (how many times per day, how many hours apart).
- How long it can be used.

The *Other Information* section tells you how to keep the medicine when it isn't being used.

The *Inactive ingredients* section tells you the parts of the medicine that aren't the active ingredient(s). These parts are added to the active ingredient(s) to help shape the form, to flavor or color the medicine, or to help the medicine last longer (preservatives). Check this section to see if there is anything that might cause an allergic reaction.

- ❖ **Child's weight and age**
  - Use your child's weight to find the right dose of medicine on the *Drug Facts* label.
  - If you don't know your child's weight or the *Drug Facts* label doesn't show a dose by weight, use her/his age to find the right dose. Never guess at a dose. If a dose for your child's weight or age is not listed on the label, ask your doctor or pharmacist what to do.
- ❖ Using more medicine than directed may raise the chance of unwanted side effects. If you think more is needed, or the medicine is needed for a longer time, talk to the doctor.
- ❖ Using less medicine than directed may not help and could cause unwanted side effects.
- ❖ **Child safety caps** on medicines can help keep children safer in your home. Most OTC medicines come with child safety caps. For your family's prescription medicines, you can ask your pharmacist for child safety caps.



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