

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions** You are an editor preparing this article for publication. Read the article, and help future readers understand the key ideas by using your critical-thinking skills to fill in the blank text features.



## OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINE SAFETY

### The Ins and Outs of Medicine Safety

#### *What you need to know to make sure that medicines help instead of hurt*

Did you know nearly 90,000 kids annually, age 19 and under, need medical help due to medicine mistakes or misuse?<sup>1</sup> Luckily, most of these errors can be prevented. Learn how you can help keep yourself and your family members safe.

#### Over-the-Counter vs. Prescription Medicines

Medicines fall into two major categories: Over-the-counter (OTC) medicine is bought in a drugstore or supermarket without the need for a doctor's prescription. Prescription medicine, on the other hand, is specially ordered by a doctor or nurse practitioner and is available only from a pharmacist. Only the person whose name is on the prescription should take that medicine. Despite these differences, there are important safety points that OTC and prescription medicines share. First, children should use these medicines only with the permission of a parent or trusted adult. It can be dangerous to misuse or abuse any type of medicine. Always read the medicine label before each use.

(add illustration or diagram)

#### The Drug Facts Label

How can you be sure you're taking an OTC medicine safely? Every OTC medicine includes a Drug Facts label, which is required by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Drug Facts label helps you understand what the medicine does, who should take it, and how to take it safely. These sections are on each Drug Facts label:

- ▶ **ACTIVE INGREDIENTS** Lists the ingredients in the medicine that make it work.
- ▶ **USES** Describes the symptoms that the medicine treats.
- ▶ **WARNINGS** Lists safety information including side effects, questions you may need to ask a doctor before use, and which medicines to avoid taking at the same time.
- ▶ **DIRECTIONS** Indicates the amount or dose of medicine to take, how often to take it, and how much you can take in one day.
- ▶ **OTHER INFORMATION** Includes how to store it.
- ▶ **INACTIVE INGREDIENTS** Lists ingredients not intended to treat symptoms (e.g., preservatives). These can be important in the case of an allergy.
- ▶ **QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?** Provides the phone number for the company if you have questions.

#### The "Just Right" Dosage

Remember the story of Goldilocks and the three bears? She needed the porridge to be "just right." Like Goldilocks, we all need the "just right" dose of a medicine. Too little medicine may not be effective; too much medicine can cause you harm. Luckily, researchers have already figured out the appropriate dose that each person needs based on age, weight, and other factors. This information is detailed in the Directions section of the Drug Facts label.

The only way to take the correct dose of a medicine is to use the dosing device that is provided (often a small cup for a liquid). Dosing devices are customized to each medicine—that's why they should never be substituted with kitchen spoons or any other household measuring device.

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# OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINE SAFETY

## The Dangers of Medicine Misuse

Some people might think that because a medicine is available over the counter, it cannot cause any harm. However, misusing any medicine by not reading and following the medicine label carefully can lead to serious consequences. For example, some ingredients may cause allergic reactions. Also, certain medicines can interact with other medicines and may cause side effects or harm when mixed. Many medicines contain the same kind of active ingredients, so it's important not to take them at the same time. Furthermore, medicines will not work properly if not taken at the proper dose!

If you think that you or someone else has taken the wrong dose or wrong medicine, or if you just have questions about a medicine, call the Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222. Experts answer the phone year-round 24/7. It's free and confidential—and unlike 911, it doesn't have to be an emergency to call.

## Safe Storage and Safe Disposal

Medicine safety is not just about following directions, it's also about safe storage. Young children are naturally curious. That is why medicines should always be stored up, away, and out of sight and reach of kids.

Medicine should be disposed of safely too. When cleaning out medicine cabinets, follow the FDA's guidelines for safe

disposal of medicines. Mix OTCs with a substance people wouldn't want to eat (e.g., kitty litter) and then place the mix in a closed container (e.g., sealed baggie) in the trash.

## Be Part of the Solution

Every year, poison-control centers manage over 84,000 cases involving medication errors in children, tweens, and teens.<sup>2</sup> Help eliminate this danger! Educate your family and community about medicine safety—and remember to always take medicine with the supervision of a parent or trusted adult.

## Glossary

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## Think It Through Record your responses on a separate sheet of paper.

### Part I Author's Craft

While you read this article, you were thinking as both a reader and a writer. Provide your analysis of the article, being sure to support your ideas with evidence from the text.

1. What is the author's main purpose?
2. Who is the author's audience?
3. What techniques does the author use in the section "The 'Just Right' Dosage" to engage the reader?
4. What text structures does the author use in the section "The Danger of Medicine Misuse"? How do these text structures help the reader understand the content?
5. Imagine you are an editor revising this article before it is published. Complete the following tasks on a separate sheet of paper.
  - Write a new introduction or conclusion to this article.
  - Create a graph or diagram that would help a reader understand this article.
  - Incorporate a new quotation or statistic from your research.

### Part II Critical-Thinking Questions

Evaluate the following statements, using evidence from the text to explain your thinking.

1. Your sibling says, "It's not safe to measure cough syrup with a kitchen spoon, but this measuring spoon for baking is okay because it's made for measuring." Is your sibling right? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.
2. Your younger sibling took some OTC medicine because she thought it looked like candy. You suggest calling the Poison Help number. Your babysitter says, "She doesn't look sick from it, so we should just wait and see if it's a real emergency." Is your babysitter right? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.
3. Your friend has a headache, and his parent gives him a dose of an OTC pain medicine. Later, he says, "It's been 30 minutes and I don't feel any better. My mom must not have given me enough medicine—I should probably take another dose." Is your friend right? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

<sup>1</sup>AAPCC National Poison Data System query parameters: 2011–2019 annual average, ages 0–19, all unintentional and intentional misuse reasons for pharmaceutical exposure, cases en route to a health care facility or treatment recommended by specialist in poison information, all outcomes. <sup>2</sup>AAPCC National Poison Data System query parameters: 2011–2019 annual average, ages 0–19, scenarios for therapeutic error by age.