

**Directions:** You are an editor preparing this article for publishing. 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

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

Did you know over 20,000 kids per year need medical help due to medicine mistakes or misuse? Luckily, most of these errors can be prevented. Learn how you can help keep yourself and your family members safe!

#### Know the Facts: 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. Also, it is always important to read the medicine label before each use. It is dangerous to misuse or abuse *any* type of medicine.

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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 the medicine, 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:** Explains 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.

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Remember the story of Goldilocks and the three bears? She needed the porridge to be "just right." Like Goldilocks, you 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. You can find this information in the "Directions" section of the *Drug Facts* label.

To take the correct dose of a medicine, always use the dosing device that is provided (often a small cup for a liquid). Dosing devices are customized to each medicine—you should never substitute a dosing device with kitchen spoons or any other household measuring device.

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# OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINE SAFETY

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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, certain 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 to not take them at the same time.** Furthermore, medicines will not work properly if not taken at the proper dose!

What should you do 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 free and confidential **Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222**. Experts answer the phone year-round 24/7. Unlike 911, it doesn't have to be an emergency to call.

## Safe Storage and Safe Disposal

If you have any younger siblings or small children in your life, you know that kids are naturally curious. That is why it is so important to make sure that all medicines are stored up, away, and out of sight.

When your family cleans out the medicine cabinet, be

sure to 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 about 80,000 cases involving medicine-dosing 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 Text Features: Explain Your Reasoning

While you read this article, you were thinking as both a reader and a writer. Explain the text features you chose to add, being sure to support your ideas with evidence from the text.

1. Why did you select the words you included in the **glossary**?
2. Choose one of your **section headings**. Explain why it fits the central idea of the section.
3. Describe the **diagram** or **illustration** you chose to include. How would this diagram help the reader understand the text?
4. Why is the **pull-out quote** that you chose so important to the central idea of the article?

### 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? How do you know?
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? How do you know?
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? How do you know?

<sup>1,2</sup> AAPCC National Poison Data System query parameters: 2011–2016 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.