



Buying over-the-counter (OTC) medicines for children

When your child has a simple illness, you can often treat it at home using over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. This information sheet explains how you can buy and use OTC medicines safely.

What are over-the-counter (OTC) medicines?

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are those that you can buy without a prescription, such as mild painkillers, cough and cold remedies and antacids.

You can buy some of these from a supermarket but others can only be bought from a pharmacy. Even though you can buy OTC medicines without a prescription, you should still take care. Taking them in the wrong way or combining them with other medicines can still have serious effects.

Medicines in the UK have two names: a generic name and a brand name. For instance, ibuprofen is a generic name and Nurofen® is a brand name. You may also hear medicines referred to as 'proprietary'. This is the same as a brand name medicine. Generic medicines contain the same active ingredient as the brand name version but can often be cheaper. Ask your pharmacist if there is a generic version available.

Buying the right medicine for your child

Your pharmacist should always be your first port of call if you have any questions about medicines.

Most community pharmacies have a quiet room where you can talk to a pharmacist in private and many hold a selection of health information leaflets as well. He or she will be able to tell you all about the medicine you want to buy and whether it is suitable for your child. Describe

your child's symptoms to the pharmacist and tell him or her about any other medicines your child is taking. This should include any vitamins, herbal or complementary medicines. If there are any doubts about whether an OTC medicine could react with another one, the pharmacist should check with your child's consultant or the Pharmacy department. You should also tell the pharmacist about any allergies your child has to ingredients or colourings.

When the pharmacist has suggested a particular medicine, make sure you understand how to give it to your child and how often.

Questions to ask before you buy

- What is the name of the medicine?
- What symptoms does it treat?
- Will it react with my child's other medicines?
- How do I give it to my child?
- How often do I give it to my child?
- For how long should I give it to my child?
- Will the medicine react with any food or drinks?
- What side effects could it cause?
- What should I do if any side effects appear?
- How do I store the medicine?

Using the medicine safely

- Check the medicine before you give it to your child. If the packaging looks damaged, the seal has been broken or the medicine itself looks different to before, take it back to your pharmacist. Read the package insert to check that it is suitable for your child. If you have any questions, ask your pharmacist.
- Check the expiry date on the medicine.
- Give the right dose at the right time. OTC medicines can be just as harmful if you give too much too often.
- Measure the dose accurately. Some OTC medicines come with a measuring cup or spoon but some do not. Ask your pharmacist for a measuring cup, spoon or oral syringe rather than guessing at a dose.
- Always keep medicines in their original packaging. It can be dangerous to transfer medicines into another container as it will be unlabelled, which could be harmful if different medicines get mixed up and taken at the wrong time.
- Some medicines do not work as well once they have been removed from the packaging, such as tablets or capsules that come in blister packs. As well as showing the name of the medicine, the packaging usually protects it as well.
- Always keep medicines out of sight and reach of children. Store medicines out of direct sunlight.

Useful numbers

GOSH switchboard: 020 7405 9200

Pharmacy medicines information: 020 7829 8608 (Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm)