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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Doses done right: Read labels before giving pain medicine to children

Your child has a fever, cough and headache. You reach in the medicine cabinet and find several bottles of pills and liquid medicines. Brand names vary, but the generic names include ibuprofen, acetaminophen, naproxen and aspirin. How do you know what is right for your child's discomfort? Is there any difference?



The answer depends on your child's age, weight and symptoms. If you are not sure which medicine to give your child, check with your pediatrician, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

What kind?

Two main kinds of pain relievers are available for most children without prescription: acetaminophen and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). There are many brands of these two pain relievers/fever reducers. Most can be found in the children's section of your local drugstore. Adult pain relievers and fever reducers contain higher amounts of medicine and should be used only for the ages listed on the package.

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is effective for infants and children of all ages. However, the AAP advises families to call their pediatrician if their infant under age 3 months has a rectal temperature over 101 degrees Fahrenheit. Recently, the Food and Drug Administration advised people to watch for rare but serious skin reactions in children who take acetaminophen.
- NSAIDs include ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Naprelan, Naprosyn, Aleve and Anaprox) and aspirin (Bayer, St. Joseph, Bufferin).
 - Ibuprofen is safe for children ages 6 months and older.
 - Naproxen is not used to treat fever in children and infants.
 - Aspirin is not recommended for children who are recovering from flu symptoms or chickenpox because it can cause a rare but serious brain disorder called Reye syndrome. The AAP advises parents to use acetaminophen or ibuprofen, not aspirin.

How much?

Parents should always read the label before giving medicine to their child to make sure they are not combining two different kinds of medicine incorrectly or giving double the dose of medicine such as cold medications that include a pain reliever.

Always follow the age, weight and dosing recommendations listed on the medicine label. Some medicines should never be given to infants and young children. Some are for children ages 6 and older, and some are only for children 12 years and up.

Medicine cups or syringes and dosing instructions are listed in milliliters (mL). Never use a kitchen spoon to measure medicine. It can lead to an overdose.

— Trisha Koriath

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