

The Right Dose

The latest on children's over-the-counter medications

BY RACHEL RABKIN PECHMAN



WHEN YOUR child is coughing or running a fever, you'll try just about anything to put a smile back on his face. We asked Kim Benner,

Pharm.D., a pediatric clinical pharmacy specialist at Children's Health System in Birmingham, AL, to advise parents about when to turn to OTC medications.

PARENT & CHILD: *The news about children's OTC cough and cold medications seems to change often. What's the latest?*

KIM BENNER: Use caution. Package labels state that these medicines should not be given to children younger than age 4, but some organizations recommend that children younger than 6 avoid them. There have been issues with cough and cold medication overdoses in children. Experts have also found that they don't necessarily improve symptoms. A cold is going to run its course with or without drugs.

P&C: *What do you typically suggest parents do to relieve their child's cold symptoms?*

BENNER: Use a nasal bulb aspirator and saline nose drops with babies. For all children, I can't emphasize enough how effective it is to give them warm fluids—chicken soup is ideal—along with plenty of rest and a cool-mist humidifier.

P&C: *How about OTC medications for fever; are they effective?*

BENNER: Acetaminophen is safe and effective for children of all ages and ibuprofen for those older than 6 months. There aren't dosing instructions for babies on the packages because it should be based on exact weight, so you'll need to ask your doctor. A true fever is 100.5°F; there's no need to treat a

temperature of 99°F, especially if the child is acting fine. But if a baby younger than 3 months has a rectal fever of 100.5°F, call your physician. It may be due to an infection.

P&C: *When should parents use acetaminophen instead of ibuprofen or vice versa?*

BENNER: Acetaminophen reduces fever and alleviates pain. It can be given every four hours. Ibuprofen reduces fever and reduces inflammation. Ibuprofen can be given every six hours. If your child has an inflammatory issue like an ear infection, you might want to go with ibuprofen. I also tend to give ibuprofen to my children when a fever-reducer is needed before bed because it won't wear off in the middle of the night.

P&C: *How can parents be sure to give OTC meds correctly?*

BENNER: Accurate dosing is key. Base the amounts on weight, not age. Avoid measuring mistakes by using the device that comes with the specific medication. And be careful not to double-dose: Sometimes Mom gives a dose without realizing that Dad just gave one. Or parents may give a fever reducer like acetaminophen along with another medication for other symptoms, not realizing that both contain a pain killer. **P&C**

Article for informational purposes only. Check with your pediatrician before giving any medication to your child.

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