

A Guide to the Most Common Over-The-Counter Medications

Produced by The Center for Wilderness Safety as a quick reference guide.

ASPIRIN (BAYER, BUFFERIN, ST. JOSEPH)

Aspirin is in a group of drugs called salicylates. It works by reducing substances in the body that cause pain, fever, and inflammation. Aspirin has four associative properties: it is an **anticoagulant** (blood thinner); **antipyretic** (fever reducer); **anti-inflammatory**, and **analgesic** (pain killer).

USE – Relieves pain caused by conditions such as headaches, rheumatoid arthritis, and muscle pain and is used to reduce fever caused by infection. Aspirin may also help to prevent heart attack if chewed within the first 3 minutes of warning signs of a heart attack appearing.

CONTRAINDICATIONS – People who should NOT take Aspirin include those who: are allergic to aspirin, Ibuprofen (NSAIDs), have asthma, rhinitis or nasal polyps, have an active peptic ulcer, or are under the age of 12. Do NOT take while also taking ibuprofen, antidepressants, or Coumadin.

DOSAGES – Aspirin comes primarily in two common doses: Adult (325mg) and Low Dose (81mg). Aspirin may also come in the form of “Child Size” (80mg), “Extra Strength” (500mg), or “Arthritis Relief” (650mg). The maximum recommended allowed dose per 24 hour time period for an adult is 8000mg (no more than 1000mg is recommended). Use as directed.

IBUPROFEN (ADVIL, MOTRIN, NAPROXEN)

Ibuprofen is in a group of drugs called nonsteroidal **anti-inflammatory** drugs (NSAIDs). It works by reducing hormones that cause inflammation and pain in the body. Ibuprofen is used to reduce fever and treat pain or inflammation caused by many conditions such as headache, toothache, back pain, arthritis, menstrual cramps, or minor injury.

USE – Relieves pain caused by conditions such as headaches, inflammation, rheumatoid arthritis, and muscle spasms.

CONTRAINDICATIONS – People who should NOT take Ibuprofen include those who: are allergic to Ibuprofen (NSAIDs), are also taking Aspirin (Ibuprofen causes Aspirin to become less effective), or are under the age of 12.

DOSAGES – Ibuprofen comes in tablets of 200mg, 400mg, 600mg, and 800mg; chewable tablets of 50mg and 100mg; and liquid capsules of 200mg. The maximum allowed recommended dose per 24 hour time period for an adult is 3200mg. Use as directed.

DIPHENHYDRAMINE (BENADRYL, THERAFLU, TRIAMINIC, UNISOM, ETC.)

Diphenhydramine is an **antihistamine** used for treating allergic reactions. Histamine is released by the body during several types of allergic reactions. Diphenhydramine also blocks the action of acetylcholine and is used as a sedative because it causes drowsiness.

USE – Diphenhydramine is used to relieve irritated, itchy, watery eyes; sneezing; and runny nose caused by hay fever, allergies, or the common cold.

CONTRAINDICATIONS – Diphenhydramine should not be given to children, under age 4. When giving to children ages 5-12, use caution and follow directions on the medication. Most people are NOT allergic to diphenhydramine, but rather then pink dyes used in the capsule form. Clear liquid or dissolving tongue tab forms may not have an adverse reaction.

MEDICATION FORMS – Diphenhydramine comes primarily as a table (25mg) however also comes as a spray (non-oral use) and dissolving tongue tabs (12.5mg and 25mg). The typical adult may require 50mg (2 tablets). The maximum allowed recommended dose per 24 hour time period for an adult is 150mg. Use as directed.

ACETAMINOPHEN (TYLENOL, APAP, ETC.)

Acetaminophen works by reducing substances in the body that cause pain, fever, and inflammation. Acetaminophen has three associative properties: it is an **antipyretic** (fever reducer); **anti-inflammatory**, and **analgesic** (pain killer).

USE – Relieves pain caused by conditions such as headaches, rheumatoid arthritis, and muscle pain and is used to reduce fever caused by infection. Acetaminophen will NOT help to prevent heart attack, as acetaminophen is not an anticoagulant.

CONTRAINDICATIONS – Acetaminophen is not recommended for those allergic to acetaminophen, as well as those who have liver disease or a history of alcoholism. Do NOT give tablets to children under age 12. For children, only give pediatric acetaminophen! Avoid other cold, allergy, pain or sleep medications while taking acetaminophen. Do NOT take more than 4000mg in any given 24 hour time period, as this may cause liver damage or failure. Do NOT take with ibuprofen or aspirin, simultaneously.

MEDICATION FORMS – Acetaminophen typically comes in tablet form (325mg or 500mg), however may also come in liquid form. The maximum allowed recommended dose per 24 hour time period for an adult is 4000mg. Use as directed.

ELECTROLYTES (NUUN, PEDIALYTE, VITALYTE, ETC.)

Electrolytes are a mixture of salts, potassium, calcium carbonate, glucose and other trace elements that the body needs. When you sweat, you not only evaporate water, but also a massive amount of electrolytes. A loss of electrolytes may lead to dehydration, etc.

USE – Electrolytes are used for those suffering from decreasing fatigue, muscle cramps, or heat exhaustion due to sweating or excessive body fluid loss. Electrolytes come in many forms; powders, tablets, liquids and gels.

CONTRAINDICATIONS – Patients should NOT take electrolytes if they are allergic to any ingredient in electrolytes. Those with high blood potassium levels should also NOT take electrolytes. If the patient is vomiting profusely and presents with ALoR, stomach ache, cramps, and claims to have been drinking lots of water and possibly even eating salty foods – do NOT give electrolytes in any other form than liquid solution. Ensure that the solution is administered slowly (1/2 cup over 20 minutes; small, soda bottle cap sized sips are recommended).

MEDICATION FORMS – Electrolytes come in various sizes. The most common is in tablet form, 33mg ea (packet usually contains 2 tablets). The Oral Rehydration Salts (USCG approved) comes in a 27.9g packet which dissolves in 1 Liter of water (1 nalgene; 1 Quart). PediaLyte comes in powder (1 packet for 8oz of water) or liquid (1 Liter) forms. There is no stated maximum daily dose of electrolytes. Use as directed.

LOPERAMIDE (DIAMODE, IMODIUM, KAOPECTATE, MAALOX, ETC.)

Loperamide is usually used to control diarrhea. It acts by increasing the amount of time substances stay in the intestine, allowing for more water to be absorbed out of the fecal matter. It also suppresses the gastrocolic reflex, decreasing bowel movements.

USE – Loperamide is used against diarrhea. Drink extra water while you are taking this medication to keep from getting dehydrated. It may take up to 48 hours before your symptoms improve.

CONTRAINDICATIONS – The use of Loperamide in children under age 2 is not recommended. Use should be stopped in the presence of bloody stool (dysentery) or fever. Loperamide may not help for cholera, Shingella or Campylobacter.

MEDICATION FORMS – This medication typically comes in tablet form (2mg) which may work for up to 12 hours. Loperamide also exists in Liquid form. The maximum allowed recommended dose per 24 hour time period for an adult is 16mg. Use as directed.

BISMUTH SUBSALICYLATE (PEPTO-BISMOL, ALAMAG, ETC.)

Bismuth subsalicylate is used to treat occasional upset stomach, heartburn, and nausea. It is also used to treat diarrhea by helping to slow the growth of the bacteria that might be causing the diarrhea.

USE – *Bismuth is used to treat heartburn, upset stomach, indigestion, nausea, diarrhea, and may be used to decrease the number of bowel movements.*

CONTRAINDICATIONS – *Do not use Bismuth for those who have had an allergic reaction to aspirin or other NSAIDs. The use of Bismuth in children under age 3 is not recommended. Use should be stopped in the presence of bloody stool (dysentery) or fever. Do not use while using doxycycline.*

MEDICATION FORMS – *This medication typically comes in tablet form (262mg) which may work for up to 30 minutes. Bismuth also exists in Liquid form (15mL or 30mL). The maximum allowed recommended dose per 24 hour time period for an adult is 1048mg. Use as directed.*

GLUCOSE (INSTA-GLUCOSE, CAKE ICING, ETC.)

Glucose is used to treat reactions caused by blood glucose (sugar). Insta-Glucose is a monosaccharide (simple sugar) which works quickly by raising the glucose level in the blood.

USE – *Glucose should be given orally and should be smeared on the gums (where chew tobacco goes). This enables the sugar to get absorbed into the bloodstream within seconds rather than waiting for the system to digest it if swallowed. Glucose may also be administered rectally.*

CONTRAINDICATIONS – *There are no contraindications for administering glucose, although it is not recommended for children under 3. If symptoms of hypoglycemia do not improve within 10 minutes, administer another tube (31g).*

MEDICATION FORMS – *This medication typically comes in either gel (31g) or tablet form. An entire tube of Insta-Glucose or cake icing should be given; and another one may also have to be administered. There is no maximum recommended dosage stated. Use as directed.*

ACTIVATED CHARCOAL

Activated Charcoal is a black pudding or toothpaste like substance that is administered to those who have been poisoned or have ingested toxins. The activated charcoal acts as a binding agent to which the toxins adhere, and are then passed through the digestive system. Rather than ipecac which makes one vomit, activated charcoal not only filters out most harmful drugs and poisons, but also does not create any damage as ipecac used to do. Activated Charcoal has now replaced ipecac and stomach pumping in most hospitals and clinics.

USE – *Activated charcoal should be given to those who have ingested poisons or toxins. Dosage is 1 gram/kg; most adults take two entire bottles of 15g or 30g activated charcoal. Children may also take this.*

CONTRAINDICATIONS – *There are no contraindications to administering activated charcoal, however it is recommended that you call Poison Control (800-222-1222) prior to administering.*

MEDICATION FORMS – *This medication typically comes in either 15g, or 25g bottles. There is no maximum recommended dosage stated. Use as directed.*