

## Cold/Flu Meds Pose Risks For High Blood Pressure

(NAPSA)—If you have high blood pressure and purchase an over-the-counter (OTC) medication, you may be getting more than you bargained for.

That's the word from experts who caution that some medications taken over the counter can have a negative impact on blood pressure.

If patients are unknowingly taking medications that elevate blood pressure, it could undermine efforts to keep blood pressure in a safe range.

### The First Step

Willie E. Lawrence, Jr., M.D., a spokesman for the American Heart Association and chief of cardiology at Research Medical Center in Kansas City, Missouri, said the first step is for people with high blood pressure to know which products could cause variations in blood pressure. Cold medicines, painkillers and energy pills or drinks are a few products to watch out for if you have high blood pressure.

"Patients should be aware of the list of things that we know can cause an elevation in blood pressure," Dr. Lawrence said. He advised that these products should be avoided, used with caution, used only for a short amount of time or used after a discussion with a medical professional.

### Tips On Using OTCs

People with hypertension should educate themselves before mixing their high blood pressure medication with over-the-counter medicines. Some things to consider include:

#### •Chat with a doctor.

Lawrence cautions that people who have high blood pressure need to tell their doctors about any over-the-counter medicine they are taking or have taken recently.

#### •Be a label reader.

Medication labels should be scrutinized as thoroughly as food labels. Patients should use increased vigilance in cooler months because when temperatures drop, colds become more common.

Look for cold medicines labeled as safe for people with high blood pressure. Decongestants such as pseudoephedrine, which may increase blood pressure, are key ingredients to avoid.

•**Skip the salt.** A top ingredient to avoid in medications, as in food, is salt, which may increase blood pressure due to fluid retention. On the ingredient label, it



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may be listed as "salt," "sodium" or "soda."

•**Avoid highly caffeinated products.** Caffeine raises blood pressure and impacts heart rate. According to Dr. Lawrence, this effect is especially intense if you're not used to it. He recommends that people with high blood pressure avoid high-caffeine energy drinks.

•**Ask before using painkillers.** Patients should also use caution and speak to their doctors before using common painkillers, such as the class of drugs known as NSAIDs, which stands for non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

This class includes prescribed medicines as well as over-the-counter aspirin, Advil (ibuprofen) and Aleve (naproxen). NSAIDs are associated with increased risks for people with heart disease and its risk factors. In addition, "These medicines may raise blood pressure a little and at higher doses they can damage the kidneys," Dr. Lawrence said. Since high blood pressure can lead to kidney disease, that makes adding NSAIDs a bigger health risk.

•**Know the numbers.** Those with moderately elevated or high blood pressure should monitor it regularly, particularly when taking new medications.

"People taking medicines in these classes should be monitoring their blood pressure at home to make certain it is staying within the range recommended by their doctor," Dr. Lawrence said. "If it increases excessively and is consistently over 140/90, then they need to speak to their doctor."

Learn more online at [www.heart.org/HBP](http://www.heart.org/HBP). Merck Consumer Care, maker of Coricidin® HBP, is a sponsor of the American Heart Association's High Blood Pressure website.