

# HEALTH ALERT!

## Safe Ways To Take Over-The-Counter Drugs

(NAPSA)—A healthy dose of information could help keep your family safe when taking over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. The next time you reach for cough syrup, ibuprofen or other medications sold without a prescription, make sure it will help reduce your symptoms without adding more.

Some OTC medications may interact with or reduce the effectiveness of medications prescribed by your doctor. For instance, people taking diabetes drugs should avoid OTC decongestants because they can counteract the medication's effectiveness by increasing blood sugar levels.

One of the best ways to protect yourself is to talk with your physician or pharmacist before choosing an OTC drug. Many health providers now use software to access the latest information on hundreds of brand name over-the-counter drugs right from their mobile device. During a phone consultation, office or pharmacy visit, a health provider may be using Epocrates software on his or her iPhone, BlackBerry, Palm or Windows device to help patients understand which OTC product may be best for them.

For example, a commonly used OTC combination product with multiple active ingredients used to treat a cold may also contain an unnecessary antihistamine that could cause or increase drowsiness. The software can help ensure that patients only take OTC

The following tips can help you safely use over-the-counter medicines:

- **Read the Label**—Look for active ingredients, correct dosage and circumstances that would make that particular OTC product a bad choice for you.
- **Get Specific**—Choose an OTC drug that treats your exact symptoms and nothing more.
- **Get Help**—When in doubt about an OTC product, consult a physician or pharmacist who uses Epocrates software.
- **Report Use**—Tell your health care provider about OTC drugs you take in order to avoid interactions with prescribed medications and monitor side effects.
- **Use Safely**—Do not exceed the recommended treatment duration or dosing. 

medicines with the ingredients needed and nothing more.

More important, it can help providers identify some harmful OTC drug interactions, such as:

- Certain OTC antacids should not be taken with antibiotics,
- Some OTC antihistamines should be avoided by people who take prescription sleeping pills,
- And, OTC decongestants and some OTC pain relievers could reduce the effects of drugs taken for high blood pressure.

For more information, visit [www.epocrates.com](http://www.epocrates.com).