

Be MedWise

Take Nonprescription Drugs With Care

(NAPS)—When it comes to treating such common ailments as coughs and colds, fever, heartburn and aches and pains, more Americans are using more types of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines than ever before.

As more OTC medications become available, a new survey finds that many Americans need help in understanding how and when to take these products. Conducted for the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE), the survey shows that many Americans do not recognize the potential risks if OTC medicines are used incorrectly.

Further, the NCPIE survey finds that while the vast majority of people who take OTC medicines (95 percent) read some portion of the drug label, few read all of the information. When asked what they look for when buying an OTC drug for the first time, only a third (34 percent) of those polled say they look for the active ingredient, while one in five (19 percent) say they seek out the usage directions and one in six (16 percent) look at the dosage level.

To change this situation, NCPIE has launched *Be MedWise*, a public education campaign about the safe use of OTC medicines. Coinciding with the introduction in 2002 of a standardized “Drug Facts” label required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the campaign is encouraging consumers to *Be MedWise* by following these simple steps:

- Read the label—every time you buy or use a nonprescription



medicine and pay special attention to the ingredients, usage directions and warnings.

- Take only the recommended dose as stated on the label.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before combining an OTC medicine with a prescription drug or with another OTC remedy.
- Keep a record of all the OTC medicines, prescription drugs, dietary supplements and herbal remedies you take, listing the active ingredient and reason for taking each one. Share this record with your health care providers at each visit.

“Nonprescription medicines play a vital role in the American health care system and the trend towards self care. But OTC drugs are real medicines that must be taken responsibly,” said Linda Golodner, President of the National Consumers League and NCPIE chairperson. “For this reason, consumers need to read OTC drug labels, compare ingredients in different products, and understand how to take OTC products correctly,” she added.

To get solutions-oriented information about using OTC medicines correctly, visit the *Be MedWise* web site at www.bemedwise.org.