

What to keep in your medicine cabinet

By Dr. Erica Olivo, Urgent Care Specialist

Springtime brings warm weather pleasures as well as its hazards- the cuts, bumps and insect bites that come from enjoying time in the great outdoors. Peer into your medicine cabinet to be sure it is stocked with the first aid supplies and over-the-counter remedies you'll need for minor emergencies, allergies and illnesses that can strike any time.

Paradoxically, the medicine cabinet is the worst place to store medications because heat and moisture can affect the their quality and effectiveness. It's better to keep all medications outside of the bathroom a linen closet or a kitchen cabinet that is away from heat and out of the reach of children.

Always check with your pediatrician before administering any medication to children. For severe symptoms, bypass the medicine cabinet and go directly to your doctor or urgent care facility.

For Pain Relief, Fever and Inflammation

Aspirin (Bayer, Bufferin): Aspirin is a common pain reliever, fever reducer and anti-inflammatory, but should be used with caution because it can cause an upset stomach and has anticoagulant (blood thinning) properties. Do not give to children under the age of 12 because it is linked to Reye's syndrome, a rare and potentially fatal condition that affects the brain and liver.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol): Relieves mild-to-moderate pain and reduces fever, but it is not an effective anti-inflammatory, so it won't help with the aches and pains caused by overdoing it in sports or minor sprains. Acetaminophen should be kept out of reach of children because it is potentially toxic to the liver. Be careful to avoid giving more than is recommended because even a small overdose may damage the liver.

Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin): Ibuprofen is highly effective as an anti-inflammatory but it can also upset the stomach, although less so than aspirin. Use only in adults and children over 6 months old.

For Colds

Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) and Phenylephrine (Neo-Synephrine):

Pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine are often contained along with other drugs in combination decongestant products, so be sure to read the labels carefully to make sure you do not take too much of any one medicine. People with high blood pressure, heart disease, or enlarged prostate should use decongestants with caution.

Dr. Olivo recommends....

I recommend using a **saline nasal spray**, which provides natural relief for nasal congestion due to allergies or colds.

For babies, use a **nasal aspirator (bulb syringe)** to quickly and safely clear your baby's stuffy nose.

For coughs in children over 12 months of age, a **spoonful of honey** suppresses a cough as effectively as does cough medicine. (Children under 12 months old should not have honey because honey may contain the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*, which causes infant botulism.)

A **humidifier** is also very helpful to keep nasal passages clear, especially in winter when air is dry.

For Seasonal Allergies and Allergic Reactions

Diphenhydramine (Benadryl): Benadryl is an antihistamine used to treat seasonal allergies and allergic reactions (to foods or bee stings) but it does cause drowsiness. Use with caution in children, because in some children Benadryl can cause stimulation rather than drowsiness.

Cetirizine (Zyrtec), Desloratadine (Clarinex), Fexofenadine (Allegra) Loratadine (Claritin): These antihistamines won't make you drowsy and you can take them during the day if you are bothered by seasonal allergies.

For Digestive Problems

Antacids (Tums, Rolaids, Maalox): Provides fast relief for heartburn and indigestion by temporarily neutralizing stomach acids. It is also safe for pregnancy.

Bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol): Treats indigestion, heartburn and the occasional bout of diarrhea, but it can make your stool look black, which many people confuse with bleeding.

Loperamide (Immodium): Treats and controls diarrhea, but follow directions very carefully as it could slow the bowel and cause constipation. Do not take Imodium if you see any sign of rectal bleeding or blood in the stool or if you have a fever, as it could mean you have a bacterial infection such as *C. difficile*, salmonella, or *E. coli* and you won't want anything to hamper your body's efforts to eliminate these infectious agent. If you have diarrhea that lasts for days you should see your doctor.

Dr. Olivo recommends....

For children with diarrhea, I always recommend the **BRAT diet** (banana, rice, apple sauce and toast).

For Skin Problems (Cuts, Burns, Insect Stings and Bites)

Hydrocortisone Cream or Ointment (Cortizone-10): Relieves minor skin irritations from insect bites and stings.

Diphenhydramine (Benadryl): Reduces swelling or allergic reactions to insect stings or bites.

Hydrogen peroxide: Good to clean a wound, but be careful not to use it on a daily basis as it can slow the healing process. Use regular soap and water for daily cleaning.

Alcohol wipes: For minor cuts and scrapes.

Antibacterial cream ointment (Bacitracin, Neosporin): Use after cleaning minor cuts and burns.

Calamine lotion: Soothes minor skin irritations such as insect bites and rashes. Calamine lotion may feel good initially but it is actually drying on the skin, so it can cause more dryness and itchiness if overused.

Bandages and gauze pads: Keep a box of assorted size bandages and a box of gauze pads to cover cuts, scrapes, and burns.

Medical tape: To hold gauze in place. For sensitive skin get hypoallergenic tape.

Ace bandage: Good to keep on hand for ankle sprains.