

# Safe Use of Acetaminophen: What You Need to Know

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## What is acetaminophen?

Acetaminophen, commonly known as Tylenol®, is widely used for pain and fever in children as well as adults. Many prescription and over-the-counter pain and cold medications contain acetaminophen, and it is important that you do not take too much. In some cases, too much acetaminophen is taken because several medications with acetaminophen are used at the same time. Taking too much acetaminophen can be harmful.

## What can happen if I take more than the safe dose of acetaminophen?

If you take more acetaminophen than is recommended, you can damage your liver. The liver can be damaged in adults after taking a single dose of 10 to 15 grams, about 31 to 47 regular Tylenol® tablets. Smaller doses taken over longer time periods may also cause liver toxicity. Liver damage from acetaminophen can be so severe that a liver transplant may be needed. Very high doses (25 to 25 grams) of acetaminophen can cause death.

## What can I do to avoid acetaminophen toxicity?

- Check the labels of all prescription and over-the-counter medications you take to see if they contain acetaminophen
- Do not take more than the recommended daily dose of acetaminophen
- When adding up your daily acetaminophen dose, be sure to include all the acetaminophen you take in prescription and over-the-counter products.
- Carefully read the labels of children and infant forms of acetaminophen for dosage information; always use the measuring cup or spoon that comes with the medication.

- Do not use high doses of acetaminophen for a long period of time unless recommended by your doctor.
- Do not drink alcohol while you are taking acetaminophen. Heavy alcohol use may increase the risk of toxicity.
- Eat regular meals when taking acetaminophen.
- Ask your pharmacist or doctor before taking a new medication to screen for acetaminophen content or other drug interactions.

## What products contain acetaminophen?

Some commonly used products that contain acetaminophen are:

- Acetaminophen (generic and Tylenol® brands) caplets, capsules, tablets, chewable tablets, liquids (Children's and Infant's acetaminophen), suppositories
- Actifed® A, Actifed® Cold & Sinus, Actifed® Plus
- Alka Seltzer Plus Cold®, Alka Seltzer Plus Cold & Sinus®
- Allerest® products
- Anacin®, Anacin®-3®
- Arthritis Foundation® Aspirin-Free
- Benadryl® Allergy/Cold tablets
- Capital® with Codeine
- Comtrex® products
- Datriil Extra®
- Drixoral® products
- Endocet®
- Excedrin® PM, Excedrin Migraine®
- Fioricet®, Fioricet® with Codeine
- Lorcet®, Lortab®
- Midrin®
- Midol®
- Pamprin®
- Panadol®
- Percocet®, Percogesic®
- Roxicet®
- Sineaid® Sinus medicine
- Sinutab® products
- Sominex® Pain Relief Formula
- St. Joseph's® Aspirin-Free products
- Sudafed® Sinus products
- Tempra®
- Theraflu® products
- Tylenol Flu®, Tylenol PM®, Tylenol Sinus®, Tylenol Cold®, Tylenol Sore Throat®, Tylenol Allergy®, Women's Tylenol®
- Tylenol with Codeine #2, 3 and 4
- Tylox®
- Vanquish® products
- Vicodin®
- Wygesic®

## **What is the safe dose of acetaminophen?**

It is not safe for a healthy adult to take more than 4 grams (4,000 mg) of acetaminophen in one day. Doses over 3 grams (3,000 mg) per day should be taken only if recommended by your healthcare provider. In general, a healthy adult can safely take 325 to 650 mg (1 to 2 regular strength tablets) every 4 to 6 hours (no more than 10 tablets per day) or 500 to 1,000 mg (1 to 2 extra strength tablets) every 6 hours (no more than 6 extra strength tablets per day).

Some should take even less acetaminophen. People who use acetaminophen for many weeks or in large amounts and those who do not eat regular meals are at higher risk of problems from acetaminophen. If you drink more than 3 drinks of alcohol each day, you should talk with your doctor or pharmacist before taking acetaminophen. Patients who drink more than 4–12 ounce cans of beer, 16 ounces of wine, or 4 shots of 80–proof whiskey each day should not take more than 2 grams (2,000 mg) of acetaminophen each day.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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Authors: Amy Skyles, Pharm.D.; Janice L. Stumpf, Pharm.D.  
Last Revised 01/2012