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OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS

Viral respiratory illnesses are self-limiting and the best treatment is time and supportive care. Therefore, it is not essential to use most over-the-counter products. These products are used for comfort purposes and they do not treat the underlying infection or shorten the duration of the illness (with the exception of antihistamines for hives or allergies). Some of the liquid preparations may contain small amounts of alcohol.

There are many products sold over the counter that have combinations of various medications below. Effect of these medications is not established and packaging can be confusing or misleading as to the purpose of the medication(s). We suggest you review any combination medicine with our providers, in addition to guidelines below.

Acetaminophen (ex. *Tylenol* or store brand):

- Not recommended less than 2 months of age unless directed by MD/PNP/PA
- Fever reducer/Pain reliever (for comfort)
- Gentle on belly, try first before Ibuprofen
- Dosed every 4 to 6 hours: reassess after 2-3 days
- No significant side effects unless overdosed
- Available as a suppository

Ibuprofen (ex. *Advil* or *Motrin* or store brand):

- Not recommended less than 6 months of age unless directed by MD/PNP/PA
- Fever reducer/Pain reliever/Inflammation reducer (for comfort)
- Dosed every 6 to 8 hours: reassess after 2-3 days
- Side effects: Stomach upset or gastritis (not recommend if vomiting/belly pain)

Antihistamines (ex. *Benadryl*, *Claritin* or store brand):

- Not recommended for children < 2 years old (unless directed by MD/NP/PA)
- Label ingredient: *brompheniramine*, *diphenhydramine*, *chlorpheniramine*, *Loratadine*
- Allergy reliever primarily (runny nose, itchy/watery eyes); not as effective for viral illnesses
- Anti-itch medication or to treat hives
- Dosed per active ingredient every 6 to 24 hours
- Side effects: drowsiness, but occasionally can cause hyperactivity or irritability. Side effects are less so with Loratadine (Claritin)

Decongestants (ex. *Sudafed* or store brand):

- Not recommended less than 6 years of age unless directed by MD/PNP/PA
- Label ingredient: *pseudoephedrine*, *phenylephrine*, *phenylpropanolamine*
- Congestion/stuffy nose reliever by shrinking blood vessels in nose/nasopharynx
- May relieve headaches and sinus pressure associated with congestion
- Side effects: fast heart rate, hyperactivity, insomnia, occasional abuse by teens

Cough Suppressants (ex. *Robitussin DM*; *Delsym* = long acting cough suppressant or store brand with "DM" suffix):

- Not recommended less than 6 years of age unless directed by MD/PNP/PA
- Label ingredient: *dextromethorphan*
- May help quiet/reduce cough frequency
- Dosed per brand every 6 to 12 hours
- No significant side effects, unless on psychiatric meds, occasional abuse by teens

Expectorants (ex. *Robitussin*, *Mucinex*, or store brand with NO additional suffix or letters):

- Not recommended less than 2-6 years of age unless directed by MD/PNP/PA
- Label ingredient: *guaifenesin*, helps break up mucous so it may be coughed up or blown out
- Dosed per brand every 6 to 12 hours

REMEMBER – the cough reflex is set off in order to clear the airway of irritation (ex. Mucous). A cough is not always bad, but needs to be evaluated if frequent, persistent, repetitive or interferes with eating/drinking.