

Chapter Two

Home Medicine Chest

You can prepare for most minor illnesses by keeping a few remedies and supplies in your home. To save money, buy only the items you will need often, and buy the inexpensive brands. [Table 5](#) on page 34 lists the products we recommend that you keep on hand. You can do almost all the home care described in this book with these items.

This chapter discusses dosages and side effects of some common medicines. Keep these points about drugs in mind:

- ▲ Always read the manufacturer's information for every product because that information can change. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions.
- ▲ Medications eventually go bad, so you should replace them at least every three years. Label non-prescription medicines with the date of purchase so that you can remember when you got them. Check your medicine cabinet regularly; you may find items that have expired or that you don't need.
- ▲ Keep all drugs out of reach of children. No bottle is totally child-proof.
- ▲ All drugs can cause side effects, even when you use them properly. Many common medicines have unavoidable side effects, such as drowsiness.
- ▲ Don't assume that a drug is safe just because it doesn't require a prescription. Misusing over-the-counter drugs can be dangerous.
- ▲ The drugs in this chapter may relieve symptoms, but they aren't cures. If you can get along without drugs, you're usually better off.
- ▲ For most medicines, different brands are available. Look for the best price. A brand-name drug is not necessarily better than a less costly generic or store-brand drug.

Hundreds of over-the-counter medicines are available at your supermarket or drugstore. For most medicines, several nearly identical products exist as competing brands. This has posed a problem for us in organizing this chapter. If we discuss drugs and treatments by chemical name, the terms can be long and confusing; if we use brand names, we may appear to favor a particular product when

Table 5 : Home Pharmacy

Page	Medication or Tool 药物或用品	Use 用途
Essential 必需品		
p. 36	Bandages and Adhesive Tape 绷带和胶带	To close and protect minor wounds 保护小伤口 让伤口愈合
p. 38	Antiseptic Cleansers (3% hydrogen peroxide, iodine) 抗菌清洁剂(3%双氧水, 碘酒)	To cleanse minor wounds 清洁小伤口
p. 39	Thermometer 温度计	To measure body temperature 量体温
p. 39	Pain and Fever Medications (acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, or ketoprofen) 止痛和退烧药(对乙酰氨基酚[扑热息痛], 阿司匹林, 异丁苯丙酸[布洛芬], 甲氧萘丙酸[萘普生], 和酮基布洛芬[酮洛芬])	To relieve pain, to lower fever 止痛退烧
p. 43	Antacids (nonabsorbable) 抗酸剂(非吸收性的)	To relieve upset stomach 缓解胃部不适
p. 45	Skin Soothers (baking soda) 肌肤舒缓剂(小苏打)	To treat skin irritation and soak wounds 治疗皮肤刺激以及浸泡伤口
Recommended for families with small children 家有幼童常备药品		
p. 46	Syrup of Ipecac 吐根糖浆	To induce vomiting in cases of poisoning from drugs or plants 儿童药物或植物中毒时用来催吐
See p. 41	Liquid Acetaminophen 对乙酰氨基酚糖浆	To relieve pain and fever in young children 幼儿止痛退烧
Optional 可选药物和用品		
p. 46	Antihistamines and Decongestants 抗组织胺及和解除充血剂	To treat allergy symptoms 治疗过敏症状
p. 47	Nose Drops and Sprays 鼻滴剂和鼻喷剂	To treat runny nose 治疗流鼻涕
p. 48	Cold Tablets 综合感冒剂	To treat cold symptoms 治疗感冒引起的症状
p. 50	Cough Syrups 咳嗽糖浆	To treat coughing 治疗咳嗽
p. 51	Laxatives 泻药	To treat constipation 治疗便秘
p. 52	Diarrhea Remedies 止泻剂	To treat diarrhea 治疗腹泻
p. 52	Sodium Fluoride 氟化钠	To prevent dental problems 预防牙齿疾病
p. 53	"Artificial Tears" Eye Drops "人工泪液"滴眼药	To treat irritated eyes 治疗眼睛刺激
p. 54	Zinc Oxide 氧化锌	To treat hemorrhoids 治疗痔疮
p. 55	Antifungal Preparations 抗真菌制剂	To treat skin fungus 治疗皮肤真菌感染
p. 55	Hydrocortisone Cream 氢化可的松软膏	To treat rashes 治疗皮疹

p. 56	Sunscreen Agents 防晒剂	To prevent sunburn 防止晒伤
p. 56	Wart Removers 除疣剂	To remove some warts 去除某些疣目(瘰子)
p. 57	Elastic Bandages 弹性绷带	To treat sprains and strains 治疗扭伤和劳损

there are equally satisfactory alternatives. We decided to give you some clues to reading the list of ingredients on the package so that you can figure out what the drug is likely to do. We don't list all available drugs, but we do mention some representative alternatives. The brand names listed in this chapter are vigorously marketed and should be available almost everywhere. They aren't necessarily superior to alternatives containing similar formulas that aren't listed.

Bandages and Adhesive Tape

Purpose

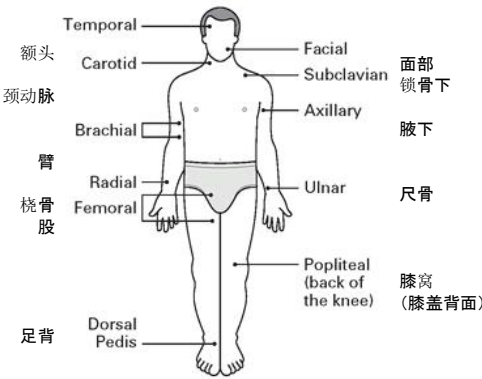
To close and protect minor wounds.
 Bandages really don't "make it better." Sometimes it's better to leave a minor wound open to the air than to cover it. Still, a home medical shelf wouldn't be complete without a tin of assorted adhesive bandages. To fashion larger bandages, you also need adhesive tape and gauze. Bandages are useful for covering tender blisters, keeping dirt out of wounds, and keeping the edges of a cut together. They have some value in keeping the wound out of sight and thus are of cosmetic importance.

Use

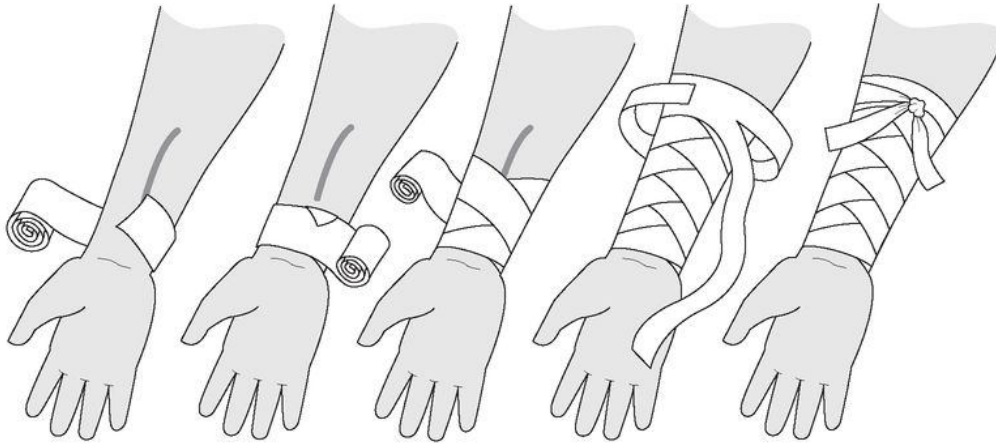
For smaller cuts and sores, use a bandage from the tin. Leaving the bandage on for a day or so is usually long enough; change the bandage daily if you wish to keep the wound covered longer. For cuts, apply the bandage perpendicular to the cut, and draw the skin toward the cut from both sides to relax skin tension before applying the bandage. The bandage should then act to keep the edges together during healing. For larger injuries, make a bandage from a roll of sterile gauze or from sterile 2"x2" (5x5 cm) or 4"x4" (10x10 cm) gauze pads, and firmly tape it in place with adhesive tape. Change the bandage daily. If you see white fat protruding from the cut, see your doctor.

Side Effects

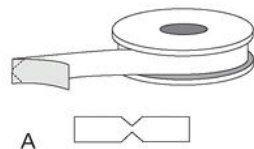
If the wound isn't clean when you cover it with a bandage, you may hide a developing infection from early discovery. Clean the wound with antiseptics and keep it clean. Change the bandage if it becomes wet. Some people are allergic to adhesive tape and should use nonallergenic paper tape. If adhesive tape is left on for a week or so, it will irritate almost anyone's skin, so give the skin a rest.
 Some people leave a bandage on too long because they're afraid of the pain as they remove it—particularly if their hairs are stuck to the tape. For painless removal, apply nail polish remover to the back of the adhesive tape (not the pad that covers the wound) and let it soak for five minutes. This will dissolve the adhesive and release both the skin and hair.



Pressure points. If a bandage doesn't stop a person's wound from bleeding, slow the flow of blood to that part of the body by squeezing on a pressure point. Choose the nearest pressure point between the wound and the person's heart. The most commonly used pressure points are **inside the upper arm** and **inside the thigh**.



Wraparound bandage. This type of bandage makes a neat, long-lasting wrap for a large wound. It is easier to tape the end of the bandage, but if you have no tape you can tie the bandage as shown.



A

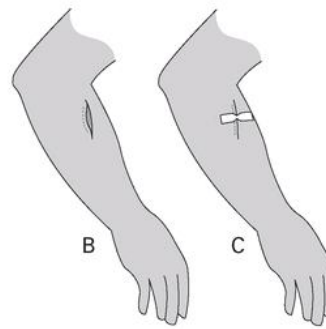
Butterfly bandage. This type of bandage allows a short, shallow wound to heal quickly.

(A) Fold a length of adhesive tape in two and snip off the folded corners.

(B) Make sure the wound is clean and that one edge is not lying over the other.

(C) Tape the wound together so that its edges meet and the narrow part of the bandage lies over the cut.

Use this only in the first six hours after injury; otherwise bacteria may grow in the wound.



B

C

Butterfly bandage. This type of bandage allows a short, shallow wound to heal quickly.

a. Fold a length of adhesive tape in two and snip off the folded corners.

b. Make sure the wound is clean and that one edge is not lying over the other.

c. Tape the wound together so that its edges meet and the narrow part of the bandage lies over the cut.

Use this only in the first six hours after injury; otherwise bacteria may grow in the wound.

Antiseptic Cleansers

Purpose

To cleanse minor wounds.

A dirty wound often becomes infected. If dirt or foreign bodies are trapped beneath the skin, they can fester and delay healing. Only a few germs are introduced at the time of a wound, but they may multiply to a very large number over several days. An antiseptic removes the dirt and kills the germs. A solution of 3% hydrogen peroxide, which foams and cleans as you work it into the wound, is a good cleansing agent, and iodine is a reasonably good agent with which to kill germs. A strong baking soda solution will draw fluid and swelling out of a wound and will act to soak and clean it at the same time. Even plain soap and water will help.

Most of the time, the solutions' cleansing action is more important than germ killing because many preparations (Listerine, Zephiran, Bactine, etc.) really aren't very good at killing germs. Antibiotic creams (such as Bacitracin and Neosporin) are expensive, usually unnecessary, and of questionable effectiveness. First-aid sprays are a waste of money.

Give careful attention to the initial cleaning of a wound and scrub out any embedded dirt particles. Do this even though it hurts and bleeds. For small, clean cuts, use soap and water followed by iodine and then soap and water again. Betadine is a nonstinging iodine preparation. For larger wounds, use hydrogen peroxide with vigorous scrubbing.

Dosage

Most hydrogen peroxide is sold at the 3% strength. Don't use a hydrogen peroxide solution stronger than 3%, such as that used for bleaching hair. Pour the solution on the wound and scrub with a rough cloth. Wash it off and repeat. Continue until you can see no dirt beneath the level of the skin. If you can't get the wound clean, go to a doctor.

Iodine is painted or wiped onto the wound and the surrounding area. Wash it off within a few minutes, leaving a trace of the iodine color on the skin.

To soak a wound in a baking soda solution, use one tablespoon (15 ml) in one cup (250 ml) of warm water. If a finger or toe is injured,

you can place it in the cup. For other wounds, soak a washcloth with the solution and place over the wound as a compress. Generally, a wound should be soaked for five to ten minutes at a time, twice a day. If the skin is puckered and "waterlogged" after the soak, it has been soaked too long. You can place cellophane or plastic wrap over the cloth compress to retain heat and moisture longer.

Side Effects

Hydrogen peroxide is safe on the skin but can bleach hair and clothing, so try not to spill it.

Iodine can burn the skin if left on full strength, so be careful. Iodine is also poisonous if swallowed; keep it away from children. Some people are allergic to iodine; discontinue use if you get a rash.

Baking soda is completely safe as long as it's used on the skin, not swallowed.

Thermometer

Purpose

To measure body temperature.

Fever is an important clue in diagnosing illness, and a very high body temperature may lead to problems. The best places to measure body temperature are the rectum and the mouth. Rectal temperatures are about 0.5°F (0.25°C) higher than oral (mouth) temperatures and usually reflect the body's condition more accurately. Oral temperatures can be affected by hot or cold foods, routine breathing, and smoking.

Thermometers are designed in different ways to make taking oral and rectal temperatures easier. Generally, oral thermometers have a longer bulb at the business end, providing a greater surface area for a faster reading. Rectal thermometers may have a shorter, rounder bulb to facilitate entry into the rectum.

Rectal thermometers are best for young children because it's hard for children to hold an oral thermometer under the tongue. Lubricants, such as Vaseline, can make inserting rectal thermometers easier. Place the child on his or her stomach and hold one hand on the buttocks to prevent movement. Insert the thermometer an inch or so (2-3 cm) inside the rectum. The reading will begin to rise within seconds. Remove the thermometer when the mercury is no longer rising, after a minute or two.

You can take an oral temperature with a rectal thermometer after sterilizing it for five to ten minutes in a 10:1 water:bleach solution. This will require a longer period in the mouth than an oral thermometer to achieve the same degree of accuracy.

Electronic thermometers, including those that take temperatures from the ear, have the advantage of quicker readings, which is useful for younger children. They're more expensive than mercury thermometers, but safer. Contact thermometers—strips of plastic held against the forehead—aren't as accurate. Electronic thermometers are rapidly becoming the standard. It is better to replace your old glass thermometers with electronic devices.

Side Effects

The mercury in older thermometers is poisonous, so care should be taken not to bite down while having your oral temperature taken.

Pain and Fever Medications

Purpose

To relieve pain and to lower fever. Sometimes, to help relieve itching.

There are five major over-the-counter drugs that do these tasks: acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, and ketoprofen. Acetaminophen probably is the safest; the other four can cause severe or even fatal bleeding of the stomach, although only rarely if just a few tablets are taken. On the other hand, acetaminophen doesn't reduce inflammation; aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, and ketoprofen do, if taken in substantial dosage. Aspirin should not be used to treat fever in children and teenagers because of the risk of Reye syndrome, a rare but serious problem of the liver and brain. Ibuprofen and naproxen are better than the others for relief of menstrual cramps.

In high doses ketoprofen appears to be more toxic than the four main drugs, so use it sparingly. Do not exceed the recommended dose.

Some over-the-counter pain medication makers conceal the key drug in the pain relief medication somewhere in the fine print under "active ingredients," and refer obliquely to the amount of analgesic, or pain reliever, present in each tablet. It's often surprisingly hard to find out what is in the drug from the box. There are really only five drugs, but many manufacturers. Each company wants its product to seem unique in a crowded marketplace, so companies develop many minor variations on a similar theme and try to develop distinctive advertising.

For example, Excedrin is half aspirin and half acetaminophen. Excedrin Extra Strength adds caffeine to the mix; this improves pain relief but may make you jittery. Some pain relievers include other ingredients. For example, an antacid may be added (as in Bufferin) in an attempt to cut down on stomach distress. Other than these variations, there's little medical reason to prefer one product over another in most cases. If you like a particular formulation, use it. If you want to save money, read the labels carefully and look for the best buys.

On some over-the-counter pain medication bottles you may see the initials U.S.P., which stand for "United States Pharmacopoeia." Although not an absolute guarantee that the drug is the best, it does mean that the drug has met certain standards in composition and physical characteristics. The same is true of the designation N.F., which stands for "National Formulary."

Finally, remember that acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxen, and ketoprofen are available by doctor's prescription at up to twice the strength of the nonprescription formulas. If you have the stronger type of one drug in your medicine cabinet, don't confuse it with the weaker over-the-counter formula. And don't combine them unless your doctor agrees.

Acetaminophen

Acetaminophen is available in several brand-name preparations (Tylenol, Datril, Liquiprin, Tempra, etc.). In the British Commonwealth, it's known as paracetamol. It's slightly less predictable than aspirin, somewhat less powerful, and doesn't have the anti-inflammatory action that makes aspirin valuable in treatment of arthritis and some other diseases. On the other hand, it doesn't cause ringing in the ears or upset stomach, common side effects with aspirin. Nor can it cause Reye syndrome, a rare but serious potential side effect of aspirin when taken by children with chicken pox or the flu.

Dosage

Acetaminophen is used in doses identical to those of aspirin. For adults, two 325 mg tablets every three to four hours is standard. In children, 65 mg per year of age every four hours is satisfactory. There is no additional benefit in taking higher amounts. Like aspirin, acetaminophen comes combined with other ingredients in products that offer little advantage over acetaminophen.

Side Effects

People seldom experience side effects from acetaminophen. If you suspect a side effect, call your doctor. A variety of rare toxic effects have been reported, but none are definitely related to the use of this drug. A major overdose can cause liver failure, and this can be fatal. Keep the bottle where children can't get at it. If you abuse alcohol, severe liver toxicity can occur at as little as 4,000 to 6,000 mg a day. Never exceed 4,000 mg per day under any circumstances.

Liquid Ibuprofen and Liquid Acetaminophen for Small Children

Aspirin is almost never recommended for the small child because of the possibility of Reye syndrome. Most pediatricians now recommend that parents use liquid ibuprofen rather than liquid acetaminophen because it is less toxic in case of accidental overdose.

Dosage

Liquid ibuprofen and liquid acetaminophen come in varying strengths, so read the label on your bottle for the correct dosage. Although the bottle will say that one dose will last for about four hours, our experience has been that it is closer to three hours. From noon to midnight, awaken the child if necessary. After midnight, the fever will usually decrease by itself and become less of a problem, so if you miss a dose, it's less important. But check the child's temperature at least once during the night to make sure. Remember, you must keep repeating the dose as long as there is fever.

Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

Aspirin

Aspirin is an ordinary and extraordinary drug. It's good for everyday problems, but it can be life-saving in your middle or later years. More expensive aspirin preparations may use coated tablets for easier swallowing or they may dissolve faster, but this usually doesn't make them more effective than cheaper brands.

If an aspirin bottle contains a vinegary odor when opened, the pills have begun to deteriorate and should be discarded. Aspirin usually has a shelf life of about three years, although shorter periods are sometimes quoted.

Dosage

In adults, the standard dose for pain relief is two tablets taken every three to four hours as required. The maximum effect occurs in about two hours. Each standard tablet is 5 grains, or 325 mg. If you use a nonstandard concoction, you'll have to do the arithmetic to calculate equivalent doses. The terms "extra strength," "arthritis pain formula," and the like merely indicate a greater amount of aspirin per tablet. This is medically trivial. You can take more tablets of the cheaper aspirin and still save money. When you read that a product "contains more of the ingredient that doctors recommend most," you may be sure that the product contains a little bit more aspirin per tablet; perhaps 400 to 500 mg instead of 325.

Here are some hints for good aspirin usage. Aspirin treats symptoms; it doesn't cure problems. Thus, for symptoms such as headache or muscle pain or menstrual cramps, don't take it unless you hurt. On the other hand, for control of fever, you'll be more comfortable if you repeat the dose every four hours during the day because this prevents fever from moving up and down. The afternoon and evening are the worst times for fever, so try not to miss a dose during these hours.

If you need aspirin for relief from some symptom over a prolonged period, check the symptom with your doctor. Relief from pain or fever is not improved if you increase the dose, and you're more likely to irritate your stomach, so take only the standard dose (650 mg every four hours) even if you still have some discomfort.

To control inflammation, as in serious arthritis, the dose of aspirin must be high, often up to 16 tablets daily, and must continue over a prolonged period. A doctor should monitor such treatment; problems sometimes occur.

Avoid using aspirin for children or teenagers with a fever because of the possibility they may later develop Reye syndrome, a potentially fatal disease of the liver and brain. We strongly recommend acetaminophen instead.

Aspirin prevents complications of high blood pressure in pregnant women and prevents heart attacks and thrombotic strokes. These are major and unique benefits. The dose for this use is very low: 81 mg (one low-dose adult aspirin) every day or every other day. Check the discussion on page 14, and check with your doctor. Most men over 50 and women over 65 should be on it.

Side Effects

In addition to Reye syndrome in children, aspirin can cause an upset stomach or ringing in the ears in adults and children. If your ears ring, reduce the dose.

Serious gastrointestinal hemorrhage or a perforated (ruptured) stomach can occur; aspirin more than doubles your risk of a bleeding ulcer. If your stomach is upset, try taking aspirin a half hour after meals, when the food in the stomach will act as a buffer. Coated aspirin (such as Ecotrin) can help protect the stomach. However, some people don't digest coated aspirin and so receive no benefit. Buffers are sometimes added to aspirin to protect the stomach and may help a little. If you take a lot of aspirin, you may want to ask your doctor about new prescription drugs that may be safer though more expensive.

Asthma, nasal polyps, deafness, serious bleeding from the digestive tract, ulcers, and other major problems have been associated with aspirin.

Ibuprofen

Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Nuprin, etc.) is about as toxic to the stomach as aspirin, and more so than acetaminophen. It doesn't cause ringing in the ears like aspirin or severe liver disease like acetaminophen may in rare cases. It appears to be almost impossible to commit

suicide by overdose with ibuprofen. But concern has been raised about kidney problems (mild and reversible), and ibuprofen is sometimes more expensive than the alternatives. It's the best over-the-counter preparation for menstrual cramps.

Dosage

Ibuprofen comes in 200 mg tablets, and the maximum recommended dose is 1,200 mg (six tablets) per day. This is about one-half the recommended dose for the prescription equivalent, but this dose is effective for minor problems and shouldn't be exceeded without a doctor's advice. Avoid use in children.

Side Effects

Gastrointestinal upset is the most frequent problem and is reason to stop or to call the doctor. Serious gastrointestinal hemorrhage or a perforated stomach can result. The rare patient with aspirin allergy may also react to ibuprofen. Read the label carefully.

Naproxen and Ketoprofen

Naproxen (Naprosyn and Anaprox by prescription; Aleve over the counter) and ketoprofen (Orudis) are also available without prescription. Naproxen has a longer "half-life" than other pain relievers, so you need to take it only twice a day. It is effective against pain, fever, and inflammation. Ketoprofen is similar and does not offer any new benefits; it may be more toxic.

Dosage

Naproxen comes in 200 mg tablets. Read the label carefully. Because naproxen is slightly more toxic to the stomach than ibuprofen, don't take more than three tablets in 24 hours or more than two if you're over 65 years old. Ketoprofen comes in 12.5 mg tablets. Do not take more than six tablets in 24 hours.

Side Effects

Stop taking the drug and call your doctor if you experience gastrointestinal upset. Avoid use in children. Do not use if there is an allergy to aspirin.

Antacids

Purpose

To relieve or prevent upset stomach, heartburn, and GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease).

Nonabsorbable Antacids

Maalox, Di-Gel, Riopan Plus, and Mylanta are examples of nonabsorbable antacids. They're an important part of the home pharmacy. They help neutralize stomach acid and thus decrease heartburn, ulcer pain, gas pains, and stomach upset. Because they aren't absorbed by the body, they usually don't upset the acid-base balance of the body and are quite safe.

Almost all these antacids are available in both liquid and tablet form. For most purposes, the liquid form is superior. It coats more of the surface area of the gullet and stomach than the tablets do. Indeed, if not well chewed, tablets may be almost worthless. Still, during work or play, a bottle can be cumbersome, and a few tablets in a shirt pocket or handbag may help with midday doses.

Absorbable Antacids

Baking soda, Alka-Seltzer, Roloids, and Tums contain absorbable antacids. The main ingredient in these products is sodium bicarbonate (Alka-Seltzer, baking soda), dihydroxyaluminum sodium carbonate (Roloids), or calcium carbonate (Tums). These medicines are more powerful acid neutralizers than nonabsorbable antacids, and they come in convenient tablet form. Calcium carbonate is also an excellent source of supplemental calcium and can help prevent osteoporosis.

Reading the Labels

Nonabsorbable antacids contain magnesium or aluminum or both. As a general rule, magnesium causes diarrhea and aluminum causes constipation. Different brands are slightly different mixtures of the salts of these two metals, designed to avoid both diarrhea and constipation. A few brands also contain calcium, which can be mildly constipating.

Different products differ in taste. While there are some differences in potency, most people will ultimately select the particular antacid that has a taste they can tolerate and that doesn't upset their bowels. Keep trying different brands until you're satisfied.

Dosage

The standard adult dose is two table-spoons (30 ml) or two well-chewed tablets. Use one-half the adult dose for children ages six to twelve, and one-fourth the adult dose for children ages three to six. The frequency of the dose depends on the severity of the problem. For stomach upset or heartburn, one or two doses will often suffice. For gastritis, several doses a day for several days may be needed. For ulcers, medication may be needed for six weeks or more, taken as frequently as every hour or so. This type of program should be supervised by a doctor.

If you wish to use baking soda as an antacid, use one teaspoon (5 ml) in a glass of water every four hours as needed—but only occasionally. Baking soda is absorbable and can upset the body's acid-base balance.

Side Effects

In general, the only problem is the effect on bowel movements. Maalox tends to loosen stools slightly, Mylanta is about average. Adjust the dose and change brands as needed. Check with your doctor before using these compounds if you have kidney disease, heart disease, or high blood pressure. Some brands contain significant quantities of salt and should be avoided by people on a low-salt diet. Di-Gel has the lowest salt content of the popular brands.

Be careful if you take baking soda by mouth. First, there's a lot of sodium in it. If you have heart trouble or high blood pressure or are on a low-salt diet, you can get into trouble. Second, if you take baking soda for many months on a regular basis, there's some evidence that it may result in calcium deposits in the kidneys and thus cause kidney damage.

Talk with your doctor before using antacids to treat side effects of other medications, such as aspirin, naproxen, ibuprofen, or ketoprofen, as they may mask a serious problem, such as ulcers.

Stomach Acid Blockers

Cimetidine (Tagamet), famotidine (Pepcid AC), ranitidine (Zantac), and nizatidine (Axid AR) are prescription drugs widely used for stomach ulcers and have been approved for over-the-counter use in lower doses to treat heartburn. Rather than neutralize stomach acid like antacids, they act to block the body's production of the acid. Most people won't need these medicines, but you can consider them if antacids aren't effective. If you take other medications, check with your doctor before taking Tagamet; it can increase the potency of a number of other medications, including some taken for blood thinning (warfarin), asthma (theophylline), and seizures. Pepcid AC may be slightly better in this regard. Don't exceed the recommended dose.

Your doctor may recommend stronger medications, called proton pump inhibitors, if necessary. These drugs, for instance Prilosec, Protonics, and Nexium, reduce the stomach acid levels more than the older drugs, but most people will not need them. They are generally well tolerated, and Prilosec is now available without a prescription.

Skin Soothers

Baking Soda

Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate, NaHCO_3) is a very useful household chemical. It has three principal medical uses:

- ▲ As a weak solution, it acts to soothe the skin and reduce itching; thus, it's helpful in conditions ranging from sunburn to poison oak to chicken pox. This is the use we discuss on this page.
- ▲ As a strong solution, it will draw fluid and swelling out of a wound and will act to soak and clean the wound at the same time. (See Antiseptic Cleansers, page 38.)
- ▲ If taken by mouth, it serves as an antacid and may help alleviate heartburn or stomach upset. Because the sodium in baking soda is absorbed by the body, however, we strongly recommend using another antacid instead.

Dosage

To soothe the skin, use from two table-spoons to a half cup (30-120 ml) in a bath of warm water. Blot the skin gently after the bath and allow the solution to dry on the skin. Repeat this procedure as often as necessary.

Side Effects

There are none as long as the baking soda is applied only to the skin.

Skin Creams and Moisturizing Lotions

There's little to be said about the various artificial materials—for example, Lubriderm, Vaseline, Alpha-Keri—that people apply to their skin in an attempt to temporarily improve its appearance or retard its aging. The various claims of such products are not science-based, and long-term benefits have not been demonstrated.

Sometimes dry skin can actually cause symptoms, thus becoming a medical problem. Remember that bathing or exposure to detergents may contribute to the drying of skin. Decreasing the frequency of baths or showers, wearing gloves when working with cleansing agents, and other similar measures may be as important as using any lotion or cream.

Moisturizing creams and lotions may make your skin feel better to you; this is the "soothing" action. Use such creams as the product labels state. They have essentially no side effects, except that a rare person will be allergic to the lanolin in some of these products.

Syrup of Ipecac

Purpose

To induce vomiting if someone has been poisoned by a plant or a drug. Vomiting will empty the stomach of any poison that has not already been absorbed. Syrup of ipecac is especially useful if you have small children.

Don't use ipecac or anything else to induce vomiting if the poison swallowed is a petroleum-based compound or a strong acid or alkali. Call the Poison Control Center immediately. See Poisoning (page 70) for more advice on poisoning.

It's far better to keep toxic chemicals out of a child's reach than to have to use ipecac. When you buy ipecac, use the purchase as a reminder to check the house for toxic materials that a child might reach; move them to a safer place. If your child does swallow something, the sooner the stomach is emptied, the milder the problem will be, with the exceptions listed above. There's no time to buy ipecac after your child has swallowed poison; therefore, you should have it on hand just in case you ever need it.

Dosage

One tablespoon (15 ml) of ipecac may suffice for a small child; two to four teaspoons (10-20 ml) are necessary for older children and adults. Follow the dose with as much warm water as can be given, until vomiting occurs. Repeat the dose in 15 minutes if you haven't had

any results.

Side Effects

This is an uncomfortable medication, but it's not hazardous unless vomiting causes material to be thrown down the windpipe into the lungs. This can cause pneumonia, so do not induce vomiting in a victim who is unconscious or nearly unconscious. *Do not cause vomiting of volatile materials, such as petroleum compounds or drain cleaner, that can be inhaled into the lungs and cause damage.* We believe that this can be an important medicine, and even life-saving in some cases. Not all doctors agree with us, however, so talk with your own doctor about its risks and benefits.

Antihistamines and Decongestants for Allergies

Purpose

To treat allergy symptoms; these agents can also reduce itching.

Chlor-Trimeton, Sinarest, Actifed, Allegra, Claritin, Benadryl, Sudafed, and Dimetapp are among the many over-the-counter drugs designed for treatment of minor allergic symptoms. They're similar to the cold compounds described on page 48, but they less frequently contain pain and fever agents like aspirin, acetaminophen, naproxen, ibuprofen, or ketoprofen. Usually these drug compounds contain an antihistamine and a decongestant agent, and sometimes acetaminophen. These ingredients can be identified from the label.

If you tolerate one of these drugs well and get relief, you may continue to take it for several weeks (for example, through a hay fever season) without seeing a doctor. However, decongestants taken as nose drops or nasal spray should be used more sparingly and only for short periods, as detailed in Nose Drops and Sprays (page 47).

Reading the Labels

The decongestant is usually pseudoephedrine or phenylpropanolamine. If the compound name is not familiar, the suffix "-ephine" or "-edrine" usually identifies a decongestant. The antihistamine is often chlorpheniramine, diphenhydramine, or brompheniramine. If not, the antihistamine is sometimes identifiable on the label by the suffix "-amine."

Dosage

Take according to product directions. Reduce the dose if you note side effects, or try another compound.

Side Effects

These are usually minor and disappear after the drug is stopped or decreased in dose. Agitation and insomnia usually indicate too much of the decongestant. Drowsiness usually indicates too much antihistamine. If you can avoid the substances to which you are allergic, it's far superior to taking drugs. Drugs, to a certain degree, inevitably impair your functioning. However, the newer "non-drowsy" antihistamines, such as Allegra or Claritin, are less prone to cause drowsiness and represent a treatment advance. Consider these especially if you are driving or using heavy equipment.

Nose Drops and Sprays

Purpose

To treat a runny nose.

A runny nose is often the worst symptom of a cold or allergy. Because this complaint is so common, remedies are big business, and there are many advertised as decreasing your nasal drip: Afrin, Neo-Synephrine, Vicks, Sinarest, and other drops or sprays.

The active ingredient in these compounds is a decongestant drug, often ephedrine or phenylephrine. These preparations are "topical," meaning that you apply them directly to the inflamed tissue. You can then feel the membranes shrinking down and "drawing," and you will note a decrease in the amount of secretion. However, there are some problems associated with using these compounds.

The major drawback is that the relief is temporary. Usually the symptoms return in a couple of hours, so you repeat the dose. This is fine for a while. But these drugs work by causing the muscles in the walls of the blood vessels to shrink, decreasing blood flow, and after many applications these small muscles become fatigued and fail to respond. Finally, they're so fatigued that they relax entirely, and the situation becomes worse than it was in the beginning. This is medically termed "rebound vasodilation" and can occur if you use these drugs steadily for three days or more. Many patients interpret these increased symptoms as a need for more medication, but taking more only makes the problem worse. Therefore, *use nose drops or sprays for only three days at a time.* After several days' rest, you may use them again for three more days.

Dosage

These drugs are almost always used in the wrong way. If you don't bathe the swollen membranes on the side surface of the inner nose, you won't get the desired effect. If you can taste the drug, you've applied it to the wrong area. Apply small amounts to one nostril while lying down on that side for a few minutes so that the medicine will bathe the membranes. Then apply the agent to the other nostril while lying on that side (see drawing above). Treat four times a day if needed, but don't continue for more than three days without interrupting the therapy.

Side Effects

Rebound vasodilation from prolonged use is the most common problem. If you apply these agents incorrectly and swallow a large amount of the drug, you may experience a rapid heart rate and an uneasy, agitated feeling. The drying effect of the drug can result in nosebleeds.



Applying nose drops or spray. Apply small amounts to one nostril while lying down on that side for a few minutes. If you can taste the drug, you've applied it to the wrong area.

Try to avoid the substances to which you're allergic rather than treating the consequences of exposure. Often, simple measures like changing a furnace filter, using a vaporizer, or using an air conditioner to filter the air will improve allergic symptoms.

Cold Tablets

Purpose

To relieve some symptoms of colds and flu.

Actifed, Chlor-Trimeton, Drixoral, Contac, Dimetapp, and dozens of other products are widely advertised as being effective against the common cold. Surprisingly, many give satisfactory symptomatic relief. We don't think that these compounds add much to standard treatment with acetaminophen and fluids, but some people believe otherwise. We don't discourage their use for short periods.

These compounds usually have three basic ingredients. The most important is a fever and pain reducer: acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen. In addition, these contain a decongestant drug to shrink the swollen membranes and the small blood vessels, and an antihistamine to block any allergy and to dry mucus.

Reading the Labels

The decongestant is often pseudoephedrine or phenylpropanolamine. If not, the suffix "-ephine" or "-edrine" will usually identify this component of the compound. The antihistamine is often chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton, etc.) or diphenhydramine. If not, the antihistamine is usually (but not always) identifiable on the label by the suffix "-amine."

Occasionally a "belladonna alkaloid" is added to these compounds to enhance other actions and reduce stomach spasms. In the small doses used, there's little effect from such a drug. It is listed as "scopolamine," "belladonna," or something similar. Other ingredients that may be listed contribute little. Don't use products with caffeine if you have heart trouble or difficulty sleeping.

These products take the much promoted "combination-of-ingredients" approach. As a rule, single drugs are preferable to combinations of drugs; they allow you to be more selective in treatment of symptoms, and consequently you take fewer drugs. The ingredients in combination products are available separately, and these individual products should be considered as alternatives. For example, the major ingredient in combination products is usually aspirin or acetaminophen. Pseudoephedrine is an excellent decongestant and is available without prescription in 30 mg and 60 mg tablets. Chlorpheniramine, a strong antihistamine, is available without a prescription in the standard 4 mg size. When possible, consider applying medicine directly to the affected area, such as nose drops or sprays for a runny nose.

Finally, note that the commonly prescribed cold medicines (Sudafed, Actifed, Dimetapp) are really just more concentrated and expensive formulations of the same types of drugs that are available over the counter (often even under the same names). Is it worth a trip to the doctor just for that?

Dosage

Try the recommended dosage. If you feel no effect, you may increase the dosage by one-half. Don't exceed twice the recommended dosage. Remember that you're trying to find a compromise between desired effects and side effects. Increasing the dosage gives some chance of increased beneficial effects, but it guarantees a greater probability of side effects.

Side Effects

Drugs that put one person to sleep will keep another awake. The most frequent side effects of cold tablets are either drowsiness or agitation. The drowsiness is usually caused by the antihistamine component, and the insomnia or agitation results from the decongestant component. You can try another compound that has less or none of the offending chemical, or you can reduce the dose. There are no frequent serious side effects; the most dangerous is drowsiness if you intend to drive or operate machinery.

In rare cases, the "belladonna" component will cause dry mouth, blurred vision, or inability to urinate. You may experience aspirin's usual side effects—upset stomach, ringing in the ears, or, rarely, bleeding from the stomach.

Cough Syrups

Purpose

Cough medication is a confusing area, with many products from which to choose. To simplify, consider two major categories:

- ▲ Expectorants are usually preferable because they liquefy the secretions the body produces while fighting illness and allow the body's defenses to get rid of the bad material by coughing it up more easily.
- ▲ Cough suppressants should be avoided if the cough is bringing up any material or if there's a lot of mucus. In the late stages of a cough, when it's dry and hacking, compounds containing a cough suppressant may be useful.

We prefer cough compounds that don't contain an antihistamine, which dries mucus and can harm as much as help.

Reading the Labels

Guaifenesin (Robitussin, Benlyn expectorant, Vicks, etc.), potassium iodide, and several other frequently used chemicals cause an expectorant action.

Cough-suppressant action comes principally from narcotics, such as codeine. Over-the-counter cough suppressants legally may not contain codeine. They often contain dextromethorphan hydrobromide (DM), which is not a narcotic but is a close chemical relative.

Many commercial mixtures contain a little of everything and may have some cold compound ingredients as well.

We'll discuss guaifenesin (Robitussin, Benlyn expectorant, Vicks, etc.) and dextromethorphan (Vicks Formula 44, Robitussin-DM, etc.) specifically; follow the label instructions for other agents.

Guaifenesin

Guaifenesin draws more liquid into the mucus that triggers a cough. Thus, the cough medicine liquefies these mucus secretions so that they may be coughed free. The resulting cough is easier and less irritating. For a dry, hacking cough remaining after a cold, the lubrication alone often soothes the inflamed area. Guaifenesin doesn't suppress the cough reflex but encourages the natural defense mechanisms of the body. There's controversy over its effectiveness, but it appears to be safe. It isn't as powerful as the codeine-containing preparations, but for routine use we prefer it to prescription drugs. Pepper and garlic, not usually thought of as medicines, have a similar effect.

Reading the Labels

Guaifenesin is also available in combination with decongestants and cough suppressants; the decongestants may carry a "-PE" suffix for "phenylephrine" and the cough suppressants a "-DM" for "dextromethorphan."

Dosage

Follow the directions on the label. Call your doctor if you have a sick and coughing child less than one year old.

Side Effects

No significant problems have been reported. If you use preparations containing other drugs, you may feel side effects from the other components of the combination.

Dextromethorphan (DM)

Robitussin-DM, Triaminic-DM, Vicks Formula 44, and others contain dextromethorphan, a drug that "calms the cough center." The drug makes the areas of the brain that control coughs less sensitive to the stimuli that trigger coughs. No matter how much you use, it will seldom decrease a cough by more than 50%. Thus, you usually can't totally suppress a cough. This is actually good for you because the cough is a protective reflex. Dextromethorphan is best used with dry, hacking coughs that are preventing sleep or work.

Dosage

See the directions on the label. Adults may require up to twice the recommended dosage to obtain any effect, but don't exceed this amount. A higher dose may produce problems, not further benefit.

Side Effects

Drowsiness is the only side effect that has been frequently reported.

Laxatives

Purpose

To treat constipation.

We prefer a natural diet, with natural vegetable fiber residue, to the use of any laxative. But if you must use a laxative, the most attractive alternative is psyllium as a bulk laxative to hold water in the bowel and soften the stool.

Metamucil, FiberCon, and similar preparations contain substances refined from the psyllium seed. They can help both diarrhea and constipation. Psyllium draws water into the stool, forms a gel or thick solution, and thus provides bulk. It isn't absorbed by the digestive tract; it only passes through. Thus, it's a natural product and essentially has no side effects. However, it doesn't always work. A similar effect probably can be obtained by eating enough celery.

Dosage

One teaspoon (5 ml), stirred in a glass of water and taken twice daily is a typical dose. A second glass of water or juice should also be taken. Psyllium is also available in more expensive, individual-dose packets for use when you don't have a measuring spoon. The effervescent versions mix a bit more rapidly and taste better to some people.

Side Effects

If you take a bulk laxative without sufficient water, the gel that is formed could conceivably lodge in your esophagus (the tube that leads from the mouth to the stomach). Sufficient liquid will prevent this problem.

There are other laxatives, less frequently needed, which are less natural. These include fecal softeners such as Colace, Dialose, and Doxidan; bowel stimulants such as Correctol, Dulcolax by mouth or rectal suppository, Imodium, Ex-lax, coffee, and milk of magnesia; and that old family standby, mineral oil. Do not use mineral oil if you have trouble swallowing. All are safe if used in moderation, but can lead to "laxative habit" in which they become necessary for good bowel movements.

Diarrhea Remedies

Purpose

To treat diarrhea.

For occasional loose stools, no medication is required. A clear liquid diet (for example, water or ginger ale) is the first remedy for any diarrhea: it rests the bowel and replaces lost fluid. When diarrhea persists, products with loperamide or bismuth are often helpful.

If these don't control the diarrhea, stronger agents containing substances such as paregoric may be prescribed. Long-term or severe diarrhea may require the help of a doctor and antibiotic treatments.

To prevent or treat "traveler's diarrhea."

It's better to use antibiotics, such as tetracycline, doxycycline, or others, than to take the older "stopper-uppers" such as Lomotil. Consult your doctor before the trip for a prescription. Sometimes you can just do this by phone. Some doctors suggest that you begin the antibiotic at the beginning of the trip. We think it is better to take the medicine with you and to begin treatment if you develop any loose stools at all.

Imodium

Imodium A-D generally has replaced other nonprescription medicines for slowing the bowel down and decreasing the number of stools. It is not for use in children. Donnagel and Parepectolin also find wide use.

Dosage

Follow the directions on the label.

Side Effects

If used to excess, it is possible for these drugs to cause constipation. Rare side effects include dry mouth, dizziness, drowsiness, and vomiting.

Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol, Kaopectate)

Dosage

Follow the label directions. For children below age three, call the doctor for dosage.

Side Effects

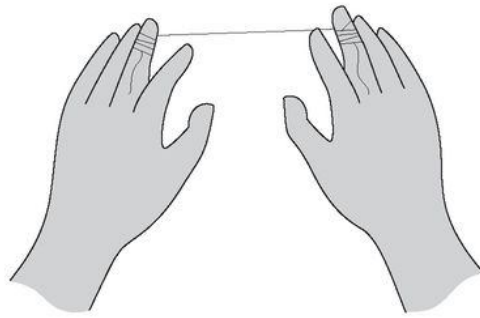
Bismuth may cause a temporary, harmless darkening of the tongue and/or stool.

Sodium Fluoride

Purpose

To protect teeth from decay.

Take care of your teeth; they help you chew. There's good evidence that preventive measures can save teeth. Brush your teeth with a toothpaste that contains fluoride as recommended by your dentist. Many doctors feel that daily flossing is the most important way to prevent adult tooth decay. Adult tooth loss is usually due to plaque buildup, gum disease, and bone loss. Water jets (such as Water Pik) remove food products from between the teeth, but they're less effective than proper flossing.



Dental flossing. Wrap floss around your two middle fingers. Use your index fingers to guide the floss into the spaces between your teeth. This way you don't need to wrap the floss tightly. Rub the floss up and down against the teeth's surfaces. If you prefer, tie the floss into a 12-inch loop and you may find it much easier to use.

Sodium Fluoride Supplements

If your water supply is fluoridated, your fluoride intake is adequate and you don't need to supplement your diet. The ground water in many areas is naturally fluoridated. Find out if your water is fluoridated; your local health department usually has the answer. If it isn't fluoridated, it's important for you to supplement your children's diet with fluoride. All authorities agree that fluoride is needed through age ten, and probably longer. Adults probably don't require dietary fluoride, although painting teeth with sodium fluoride paste by the dentist is felt to be helpful, as is use of a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride is effective in preventing tooth decay in persons of all ages. Please support your local health department in fluoridation of water. The occasional person or organization that opposes fluoridation is not aware of the strong science base.

Dosage

Fortunately it's relatively easy to supplement with fluoride when the water supply isn't treated. Buy a large bottle of soluble fluoride tablets. Most tablets are 2.2 mg and contain 2 mg of fluoride; the rest is a soluble sugar.

If the water supply has low fluoride content, children under the age of three need approximately 0.25 mg per day, ages three to six need 0.5 mg, and ages six to ten need 1 mg. With partially fluoridated water, check doses with your dentist. The tablets can be chewed or swallowed. They may also be taken in milk; they don't alter its taste. In states where fluoride is available only by prescription, request a prescription from your doctor or dentist on a routine visit.

Side Effects

Too much fluoride will mottle the teeth (make gray spots) and won't give them additional strength, so don't exceed the recommended dosage. At the recommended dosage, there are no known side effects; fluoride is a natural mineral present in many natural water supplies.

"Artificial Tears" Eye Drops

Purpose

To treat irritated eyes.

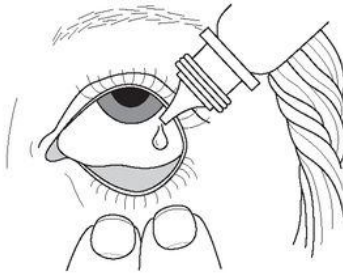
The tear mechanism normally cleans, soothes, and lubricates the eye. Occasionally, the environment can overwhelm this mechanism, or not enough tears may flow. In these cases the eye becomes "tired," feels dry or gritty, and may itch. A number of compounds that may aid this problem are available.

There are two general classes of eye preparations. One class contains compounds intended to soothe the eye (Murine, Prefrin, etc.). Added to these compounds may be decongestants that shrink blood vessels and thus "get the red out" (Visine, Murine Plus, Visine LR). Their capacity to soothe is debatable. The use of decongestants to get rid of a bloodshot appearance is totally cosmetic. It's even possible that such preparations interfere with the normal healing process, so we don't recommend them.

The other class of preparations makes no claims of special soothing effects and contains no decongestants. Their purpose is to lubricate the eye, to be "artificial tears." These are chemical solutions similar to those of the body, so that no irritation occurs. Ophthalmologists prefer such preparations for minor eye irritation. Murine Lubricating Eyedrops is one example.

Dosage

Use as frequently as needed in the quantity required. You can't use too much, although usually a few drops give just as much relief as a bottleful. If you have a constant problem with dry eyes, check it out with your doctor because it may indicate an underlying problem. Usually the symptom of dry eyes lasts only a few hours and is readily relieved. Too much sun, wind, or dust usually causes the minor irritation.



Inserting eye drops. Gently pull down the lower lid. Drip the solution into the sac formed by the lid, not on the eyeball itself. Blink a few times.

Side Effects

No serious side effects have been reported. Visine and other drugs containing decongestants tend to sting a bit.

None of these drugs treats eye infections or injuries or removes foreign bodies from the eye. In Part II, "Common Problems," we give instructions for more severe eye complaints (pages 132-141).

Zinc Oxide

Purpose

To treat hemorrhoids.

Zinc oxide powders and creams soothe the irritated area while the body heals the inflamed vein. They also help toughen the skin over the hemorrhoids so that it's less easily irritated. Many people get relief with Preparation H, Anusol, or others, but these offer little advantage.

Reading the Labels

We don't advocate the use of creams that contain ingredients identified by the suffix "-caine" because repeated use of these local anesthetics can cause further irritation.

Dosage

Apply as needed, following label directions. Don't trap bacteria beneath the creams; apply them after a bath when you have carefully cleaned and dried the area. Remember to clean the area thoroughly with soap and water each day.

Side Effects

Essentially none.

Antifungal Preparations

Purpose

To treat fungus infecting the skin, mouth, throat, and vagina.

Fungal infections of the skin usually aren't serious, so treatment isn't urgent. In general the fungus needs moist, undisturbed areas to grow and will often disappear with regular cleansing, drying, and application of powder to keep the area dry. Clean and dry the area twice daily.

If you need a medication, there are effective nontoxic agents available. For athlete's foot, try one of the zinc undecylenate creams or powders, such as Desenex. In difficult cases, tolnaftate (Tinactin, etc.) and clotrimazole (Lotrimin, etc.) are useful for almost all skin fungus problems, but they are more expensive.

Miconazole (e.g., Monistat 7) is effective and safe for yeast infections (candida monilia) of the mouth, throat, and vagina. If you experience no relief after a week, see the doctor.

Dosage

For athlete's foot, use as directed on the label. For other skin problems, selenium sulfide is effective. It's available by prescription in a 2.5% solution but also over the counter in a 1% solution as Selsun Blue shampoo. Use the shampoo as a cream and let it dry on the skin; repeat several times a day to compensate for the solution's weaker strength.

Side Effects

There are very few. Selenium sulfide can burn the skin if used to excess, so decrease application if you notice any irritation. Selenium

may discolor hair and will stain clothes. Be very careful when applying any of these products around the eyes. Don't take them by mouth.

Hydrocortisone Cream

Purpose

To temporarily relieve skin itching and rashes such as poison ivy and poison oak.

Brand names of over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream include Calde-CORT, Cortizone-10, and Benadryl Itch Relief Cream. These are strong, local anti-inflammatory preparations. Used for a short period, these creams are safe and almost totally nontoxic. They'll clear up many minor rashes, but they "suppress" a condition rather than "cure" it.

Dosage

Rub a very small amount into the rash. If you can see any cream remaining on the skin, you've used too much. Repeat as frequently as needed, which often is every two to four hours.

Side Effects

Over the long term, these creams can cause skin atrophy (thinning of the skin), so limit their use to a two-week period. Beyond this time, check with your doctor. Theoretically, these creams can make an infection worse, so be careful about using them if it is possible the "rash" might be infected. Don't use these creams around the eyes, and don't take them by mouth.

Sunscreen Agents

Purpose

To prevent sunburn.

Dermatologists continually remind us that sun is bad for the skin. Exposure to the sun accelerates skin aging and increases the chance of skin cancer. Advertisements, on the other hand, keep extolling the virtues of a suntan. As Americans, we spend much of our youth trying to achieve a pleasing skin tone and disregard the later consequences.

Sunscreen agents can prevent burning but allow you to be in the sun. If your skin is unusually sensitive to the sun's effects, it's best to block the rays; this is achieved with a strong sunscreen agent, like Presun, or any PABA-containing agent with a high sunscreen number. The rating numbers on the label are a good guide to the blocking power of the different agents. The higher the number, the better the blocking power. Suntan lotions that aren't sunscreen agents block relatively little solar radiation.

The length of time an agent stays on the skin is important. Even the strongest cream or lotion won't help after it has washed off, so look for the nonwatersoluble products if you plan to be in and out of the water.

Dosage

Apply evenly to exposed areas of skin as directed on the label.

Side Effects

Very rare skin irritation and allergy have been reported.

Wart Removers

Purpose

To remove warts.

Warts are a curious little problem. The capricious way in which they form and disappear has led to countless myths and home therapies. They can be surgically removed, burned off, or frozen off, but they'll also go away by themselves or after treatment by hypnosis. Warts are caused by a virus and are a reaction to a minor local viral infection. If you get a wart, you're likely to get more. When one disappears, the others often go away also. The exception is plantar warts, on the sole of the foot, which won't go away by themselves and sometimes not even with home treatment. The doctor may be needed.

Over-the-counter chemicals, such as Compound W and Wart-Off, are moderately effective for treatment of warts. They contain a mild skin irritant. By repeated application they slowly burn off the top layers of the wart, and eventually the virus is destroyed.

Dosage

Apply repeatedly, as directed on the product label. Persistence is necessary.

Side Effects

These products are effective because they are caustic to the skin. Be careful to apply them only to the wart, and be very careful around your eyes or mouth.

Elastic Bandages

Purpose

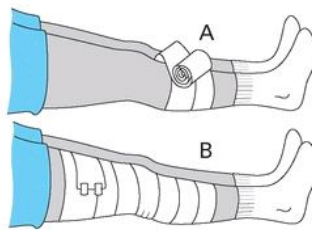
To treat sprains and similar injuries.

Any family periodically needs elastic (Ace, etc.) bandages. You'll probably need both a narrow and a broad width. If problems recur, the one-piece devices designed specifically for knees and ankles are sometimes more convenient. All these bandages primarily provide gentle support, but they also act to reduce swelling. The support given is minimal, and it's possible to reinjure the body part despite the bandage. Thus, an elastic bandage isn't a substitute for a splint, a cast, or a proper adhesive-type dressing. Perhaps the most important function of these bandages is to remind yourself that you have a problem so that you're less likely to reinjure yourself.

Application

When wrapping the bandage, start at the far end of the area to be bandaged and work toward the trunk of the body, making each loop a little looser than the one before. Thus, a knee bandage should be tighter below the knee than above, and an ankle bandage should be tighter on the foot than on the lower leg. Many people think that because a bandage is elastic it must be stretched. That's wrong. The stretchability is to allow the person to move. Simply wrap the bandage as you would a roll of gauze.

Continue using the bandage as support well past the time of active discomfort to allow complete healing and to help prevent reinjury; this usually takes about six weeks. During the latter part of this period, you can stop using the bandage except during activities that will likely stress the injured part. Remember that reinjury is still possible while these bandages are being used.



Wrapping an elastic bandage.

a. Start wrapping the bandage on the far side of the joint (in this case, the knee). Don't stretch the bandage as you wrap.

b. Wrap past the joint, firmly at first then more loosely the farther up you go. Use the clips that come with most elastic bandages to fasten the loose end.

The newer "bandages" for the knee and ankle slip on and provide better support but are a little more expensive. For even better protection, knee braces with metal hinges on the sides provide more support.

Side Effects

The simple elastic bandage or knee brace can cause trouble when it is too tight. Problems arise when circulation in the limb beyond the bandage is impaired. The bandage should be firm but not tight. The limb shouldn't swell, hurt, or be cooler beyond the bandage. The skin shouldn't have any blue or purple color.

Vitamin Preparations

The use of vitamin supplements has always been controversial. In the past there was theoretical reason to believe that supplements might have benefits; there were also good reasons to believe that these benefits might only be theoretical. Classic diseases of vitamin deficiency (scurvy, beriberi, pellagra, etc.) are rare and occur only in people whose diets are inadequate in virtually every respect, or who have diseases or take medications that interfere with natural vitamins. Most past research on vitamin intake studied diet only and didn't directly address the issue of supplements to the diet. This research suggested that a well-balanced diet should provide adequate amounts of vitamins and minerals.

On the other hand, it's now known that there are specific situations in which vitamin supplements are appropriate. There are good studies indicating that supplements may be useful in individuals with "average" diets outside the special circumstances mentioned above. Here's a summary of current information on vitamin supplements.

- ▲ Vitamin A: Multiple studies of prevention of a variety of conditions have been inconclusive.
- ▲ Vitamin C: A Canadian study indicated that people over age 55 who took vitamin C supplements (at least 300 mg daily for five years) have a 70% lower risk for eye cataracts, but most other studies of a variety of conditions have been disappointing or have shown only minor benefit.
- ▲ Vitamin D: Most pediatricians recommend vitamin D supplements for infants who are breast-feeding.
- ▲ Vitamin E: Some studies suggest that vitamin E supplements (400 International Units [IU]) may reduce the risk of heart disease by preventing the oxidation of LDL cholesterol. Some other studies, however, have been negative. The Canadian study that looked at vitamin C supplements and cataracts also investigated vitamin E supplementation (400 IU daily) and found a lower risk of cataracts.
- ▲ Folic acid: Several studies have demonstrated that the use of a folic acid supplement (1 mg per day) before and during early pregnancy greatly reduces the risk of severe defects of the nervous system in the baby. With vitamin B₆ and B₁₂, folic acid may reduce the chances of a heart attack by reducing blood levels of homocysteine. Because of this, increasing numbers of doctors encourage use of folic acid and multivitamins. Since 1998 folic acid has been required in breads and cereals and spinal cord birth defects have greatly reduced in frequency.
- ▲ Multivitamins and minerals: One study suggested that the use of a multivitamin and mineral preparation by healthy adults over 65 reduced the number of illness days by more than half. This supplement contained vitamin A, beta-carotene, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin B₆, folic acid, vitamin B₁₂, vitamin C, vitamin D, vitamin E, iron, zinc, copper, selenium, iodine, calcium, and magnesium. The amount of each vitamin or mineral was similar to the current recommended daily allowances except for beta-carotene and vitamin E, which were above the usual recommended allowances.

The use of vitamin supplements for purposes other than those indicated above is entirely optional. They're unlikely to cause problems when taken in reasonable dosages, but consider the cautions listed below. If you do buy vitamins, the cheaper "house" brands usually are of similar quality to those that are heavily advertised.

Dosage

Multivitamin preparations usually contain the current recommended daily allowance of each vitamin. Other dosages are indicated above.

Side Effects

Vitamin A, vitamin D, and vitamin B6 (pyridoxine) can cause severe problems when taken in excessively large doses. Large doses of vitamin C have been reported to be associated with kidney problems in rare instances. Other vitamins have not been studied as extensively, but serious side effects appear to be very rare.