

Medication Information Sheet



Acetaminophen/apap

brands: Tylenol® & many others

Medications are only ONE part of a successful treatment plan. They are appropriate when they provide benefit, improve function and have either no or mild, manageable side effects. Importantly, medications (even if natural) are chemical substances not expected in the body, and as such have side effects. Some of the side effects might be unknown. The use of medications/drugs for any purpose requires patient consent. This practice does NOT require a patient to use any medication.

Information & potential benefits

Acetaminophen (apap) is a fever-reducer and pain-killer in its own class. It does not reduce inflammation. Patients may use acetaminophen on its own (Tylenol, store brands) or they may find it as an ingredient in several other medications (cold remedies like TheraFlu or NyQuill, aspirin-free pain meds like Excedrin Migraine, sinus medications like Coricidin Sinus, sleeping pills like Tylenol PM, etc.). The expected benefits of acetaminophen are reduction of fever and reduced pain. Because it does not cause GI bleeding (like aspirin and NSAIDs can), it often is believed to be safer than aspirin or NSAIDs. Acetaminophen is combined with opioids in order to augment the power of the opioid. Percocet, Ultracet, Vicodin and Norco are examples.

Potential risks and side effects

Although most people are familiar with acetaminophen, and tolerate it very well, there still are significant risks associated with its use. In general, proper use of acetaminophen is safe. The risk of irreversible and fatal liver failure is well known, with acetaminophen causing three times more liver failure than all other drugs combined. The risk is associated with both how much acetaminophen is taken at one time (1000mg max) and how much acetaminophen is taken total per day (4000mg max). Acetaminophen is not to be taken with alcohol because this increases the liver risk. There is evidence that the lifetime consumption of apap slowly adds up in the body, increasing the chance of end-stage kidney failure. Acetaminophen also has additional potential risks, most of which are very rare, but still possible. Allergic reactions, blood disorders such as anemia, abdominal pain, asthma, rash and similar side effects may all occur.

Dosing information

Again, acetaminophen—when used properly—tends to be very safe. In fact, the FDA has found it so safe that it does not require a prescription. However, no chemical ingested into the body is without potential risk. Alternatives include non-medication modalities, pain interventions and other medications that may work in a similar manner but that may have different potential risks. Recommendations from liver specialists currently include: 1000mg at any one time, 4000mg per day maximum for short-term use (up to 1 month), 2000mg per day maximum for long-term use. No alcohol!

Important information

Disclaimer: This is for informational purposes only. This does not replace the instructions you received from your provider, does not constitute initiation of medical treatment or establishment of a patient-physician relationship, does not constitute any form of recommendation, prescription or medical advice, and does not imply that the medication is appropriate or FDA approved for any condition. This information is not a complete listing of instructions, doses, uses or side effects. If this was prescribed to you, you must review this information with your pharmacist and prescriber before starting the medication. Any medication may interfere with the ability to drive, concentrate or operate machinery; patients must be responsible for their own behavior and should not engage in any dangerous activity if there is any question of impairment. All medications have side effects and drug interactions, some serious, some fatal. Let all of your practitioners and pharmacists know about every substance used. Alcohol, herbals or illegal drugs are not considered safe with these medications. Assume no medication is safe during pregnancy or while breast feeding. The medication may interfere with birth control. Almost any medication can cause sleepiness, insomnia, dizziness, confusion, hallucinations, anxiety, panic, constipation or diarrhea, headache, chest pain and nausea or vomiting, among others. Most medications should NOT be stopped suddenly because of the risk of withdrawal.