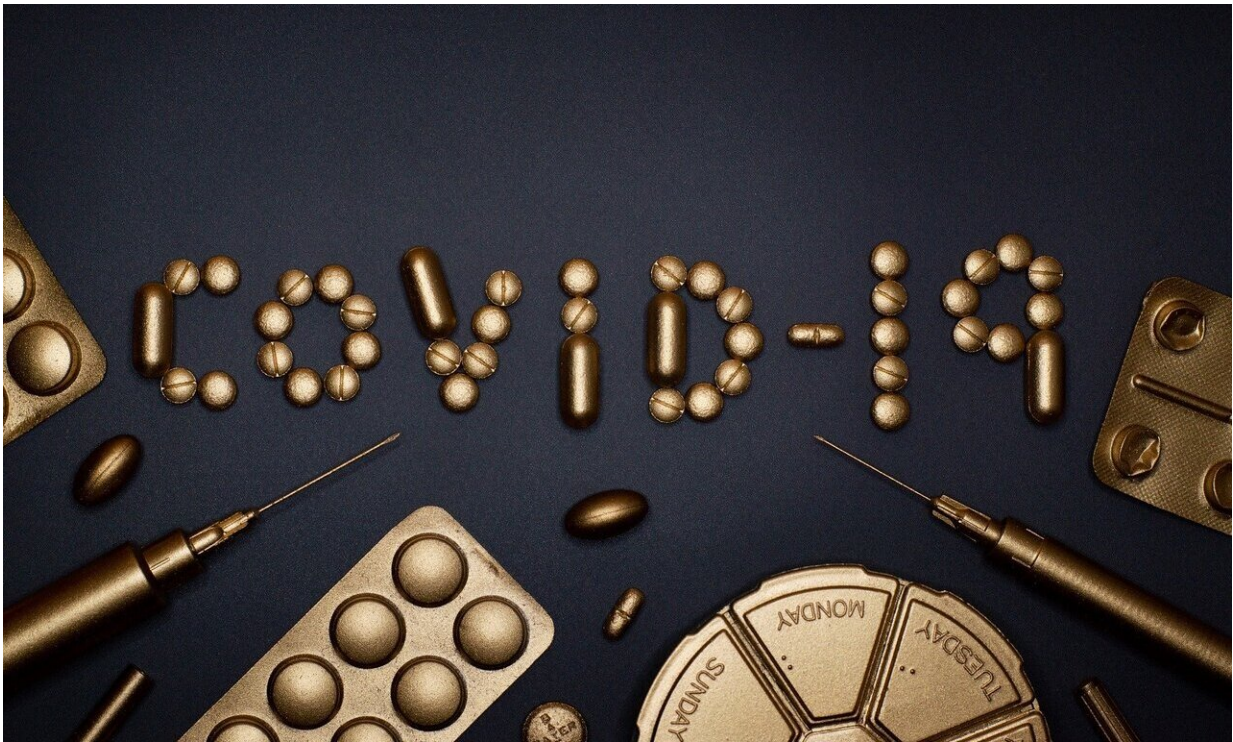


# Q&A: Which over-the-counter medications work best for treating COVID-19?

November 28 2023, by Emily Landon

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Since COVID-19 first spread rapidly around the world in 2020, we have significantly more options to reduce the symptoms and severity of the virus. COVID-19 symptoms usually begin in the first five days after exposure and can last up to 14 days. For many people, over-the-counter medications like Advil and Tylenol are enough to reduce symptoms

while the virus runs its course.

For those who have existing [medical problems](#), are over 65 or are immunocompromised, prescription medication can shorten the duration and reduce the severity of the virus. Prescription medications for COVID-19 are most effective if used soon after developing symptoms.

If you test positive for COVID-19, speak to your doctor right away about what treatment is right for you. You shouldn't wait to see if your symptoms get worse before asking for [prescription medication](#).

## **Which OTC medications are best for treating COVID-19 symptoms?**

The most important thing to know about using over-the-counter medications to treat COVID-19 is that none of these common drugstore products treat the virus itself. But these medications can certainly make you feel a whole lot more comfortable when you're sick. Just make sure you're following the dosing guidelines on the label, especially for products like Tylenol.

If you have other medical problems or take other medications, you should probably check with your doctor to make sure OTC medicines aren't a problem for you. That said, taking what works for you when you have a cold or the flu will probably make you feel better with COVID-19, too.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol), naproxen (Aleve) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) can help lower your fever. Be sure you don't have a health history that should prevent you from using them. Lowering a fever is usually unnecessary—an elevated temperature is meant to help your body fight off the virus. But if you feel really awful, it's fine to take a

fever reducer.

If your temperature is over 104 F, or you or your child has a history of febrile seizures, you will probably need to take something. You should contact your doctor.

These medicines will also help you get through the body aches. You can also try to manage coughs and [sore throats](#) with chamomile or [herbal tea](#), hot water with lemon, lozenges and decongestant balms like Vicks VapoRub (or something similar). Most OTC cough medications have proven ineffective, and I don't recommend them.

Finally, if you have diarrhea or stomach issues, the best thing to do is to let them run their course and stay hydrated by drinking lots of liquids. Contact your doctor if you can't keep liquids down or feel dizzy. Just remember, you aren't really better until you feel well without taking any of these medications.

## **Can acetaminophen (Tylenol) treat COVID-19?**

Acetaminophen, also called paracetamol or Tylenol, helps to reduce fevers and can definitely help manage muscle pain and body aches associated with COVID-19. Acetaminophen doesn't treat the virus itself, nor does it reduce the duration of your illness. Many people feel pretty miserable from a fever, which means a fever reducer like acetaminophen is definitely an option for some relief.

That said, make sure you don't take more than what's specifically listed on the label because [higher doses](#) can be dangerous to your liver. If you've ever been told by your doctor that you shouldn't take Tylenol, you definitely should not take it now.

## **Can ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) treat COVID-19?**

Ibuprofen, also known by the brand names Advil and Motrin, is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID). These medications can help lower your fever and minimize muscle aches from COVID-19 while also reducing some inflammation in your body. Ibuprofen doesn't treat the virus itself, but it can make you feel a lot better.

There was some concern early on in the coronavirus outbreak that ibuprofen and drugs like it might worsen outcomes for coronavirus patients, but so far we haven't seen anything to support that. I recommend ibuprofen when fevers are high or people are feeling really miserable. However, you should still be careful: take ibuprofen with food, and if you have any underlying kidney disease or ulcer disease, you may not want to reach for ibuprofen.

## **Can naproxen (Aleve) be used to treat COVID-19?**

Naproxen, known as Aleve, is another NSAID (like ibuprofen) that can reduce inflammation and lower your [fever](#). It cannot treat COVID-19 itself, but it can certainly help you feel better. Naproxen is similar to ibuprofen, except that it lasts longer. For many people, a single pill can keep your temperature down for up to 12 hours and help stave off body aches. But remember, if your doctor has told you not to take medications like [ibuprofen](#) or naproxen before, you shouldn't take either now.

## **What prescription medication can treat COVID-19?**

There are several FDA-approved or authorized antiviral medications that can be used to treat COVID-19 for those who have existing medical problems, are over 65 or who are immunocompromised. Antiviral medication stops the virus in its tracks from making copies of itself in

your body. This reduces the severity of the illness and the likelihood of hospitalization and death. Some of these medications are even available for children. Some antiviral treatments are oral, like Paxlovid, and others are IV [antiviral medications](#), like Remdesivir.

The medications are most effective when they are taken within a few days of the start of symptoms. Some COVID-19 treatments have interactions with other medications, so it's important to talk to your doctor about any medicine and supplements you are currently taking. Physicians are skilled at navigating these interactions to make sure the most vulnerable patients can get the best benefit from these COVID treatments.

Speak to your physician to decide if an antiviral [medication](#) is right for you.

Cases of COVID-19 continue to occur in our communities. Staying current on COVID-19 vaccination is the best way to protect your health and community.

Provided by University of Chicago

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