

# Allergy medications come with hazards: Be aware

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People with seasonal allergies often turn to over-the-counter and prescription medicines to relieve symptoms like coughing, sneezing, runny nose, congestion and itchy eyes, nose or throat.

But they often aren't aware that these meds—including antihistamines—have as much risk for potential [side effects](#), drug interactions and overdose as other drugs.

"All medicines have side effects associated with them even when they are taken appropriately and according to dosing directions on the label," said Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School.

"We want consumers to be aware of the potential side effects of over-the-counter and prescription allergy medicine, which can range from agitation to drowsiness to upset stomach or [liver damage](#)," Calello added in a Rutgers news release.

To manage these risks, experts offer the following safety tips:

- **Lock up medicine.** Children and pets are curious, and so have an increased risk of accidentally ingesting meds. This could lead to poisoning
- **Pick medicines for your specific symptoms.** Use a decongestant if you're congested. But only use a decongestant containing cough suppressant if you also have a cough. More meds included in a pill or potion increases the risk of drug interactions
- **Be aware of alcohol.** Many ingredients in cold and allergy remedies can interact dangerously with alcohol, causing side effects like nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, fainting and loss of coordination. These interactions can occur even if the meds and alcohol aren't ingested at the same time
- **Check the active ingredients.** Many meds have the same active ingredients, even if they have different names or are intended to treat different conditions. Taking these together can result in an overdose

- **More isn't better.** Don't take meds longer or in higher doses than the label recommends. Always measure the amount of liquid medicine taken using a syringe, dosing spoon or cup, rather than swigging from the bottle. Don't use a kitchen spoon because sizes can vary
- **Don't get behind the wheel.** Many meds make driving or operating heavy machinery unsafe. They can cause sleepiness, fatigue, loss of attention, [blurred vision](#) and decreased coordination. "Drugged driving" can get you in the same kind of trouble as driving drunk
- **Children's dosage recommendations are serious business.** Infants and kids should only be given medicines formulated specifically for them. Meds should be measured to the child's weight, rather than their age
- **Know your interactions.** Ask a pharmacist or [health care provider](#) about the potential drug-[drug interactions](#) of the medicines you are taking. They can help you choose meds that will not dangerously interact with one another

**More information:** Johns Hopkins Medicine has more on [medication safety tips](#).

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