

# TO YOUR HEALTH

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## Over-the-Counter Medication Safety During Cold and Flu Season

By Emily Robinson, NP



Cold and flu season is in full swing and, while there are many over-the-counter medications that can provide symptom relief, these remedies can also come with health risks.

### Nasal Decongestants

#### ***Pseudoephedrine***

Pseudoephedrine, the active ingredient in brand-name Sudafed, is a nasal decongestant that can be somewhat effective in drying the nasal and sinus passages and decreasing congestion, but comes with significant side effect risks, particularly in older adults.

Common side effects of pseudoephedrine include a jittery or nervous feeling, an elevated heart rate or palpitations, dry mouth, decreased appetite, and constipation. Pseudoephedrine can also lead to confusion, hallucinations, or blurred vision and is not recommended before driving.

It is best for all older adults to avoid pseudoephedrine but it should never be taken by those with high blood pressure, or those who take high blood pressure medication, those with a heart condition, such as an arrhythmia or heart disease, or those who have diabetes.

Of note, there is another over-the-counter form of this medication, phenylephrine, which does not require identification to purchase. It carries similar side effect risks and has not been shown to be effective in reducing nasal congestion.

#### ***Antihistamines***

Antihistamines, such as diphenhydramine and doxylamine, are often found in combination cough and cold medications to assist with sleep.

Antihistamines can lead to excessive drowsiness, confusion and increase risk for injury or falls. They should be avoided in older adults.

### Cough Suppressants

Dextromethorphan is a cough suppressant that is found in many common over-the-counter cough medications, including Robitussin. It is important to always read the ingredient label, but the “DM” that follows a cough medication name, such as Robitussin DM, refers to dextromethorphan. Dextromethorphan can be sedating and lead to confusion. It can also interact with depression and anxiety medications, increasing risk for confusion, elevated heart rate, and agitation.

### Fever Reducers and Analgesics

#### ***NSAIDS***

NSAIDS are a class of medication that includes ibuprofen (Advil) and naproxen (Aleve). While NSAIDS can be used to reduce fever and discomfort in cold and flu viruses, older adults are at increased risk of side effects and thus their use is not recommended for this group. Risks associated with NSAIDS include:

- Stomach upset, nausea and vomiting
- Gastric or peptic ulcer or a gastrointestinal bleed
- Increased risk of heart attack and stroke in those with and without cardiovascular disease

NSAIDS carry an increased bleeding risk and therefore should NEVER be taken by those who take an anticoagulant or blood-thinning medication.

NSAIDS should also be avoided by those with high blood pressure and kidney disease, as they can exacerbate these symptoms.

Of note, aspirin, which is of a different medication class, carries similar risks to NSAIDS. Many people take aspirin for cardiovascular disease prevention and treatment at the direction of their medical provider. Please speak with your provider before starting or stopping aspirin. It is not recommended for symptom relief from a cold or flu-like illness.



### ***Acetaminophen***

Acetaminophen, or Tylenol, is generally an excellent choice for most people to reduce fever and relieve discomfort associated with cold and flu viruses. Acetaminophen can lead to liver injury when taken in unsafe doses, and thus attention to dosing is important.

Acetaminophen comes in both “regular strength”, or 325 mg tablets, and “extra strength”, or 500 mg tablets. You should not exceed 3,000 mg in a 24-hour period. Do not hesitate to review dosing with the pharmacist or your medical provider prior to taking.

### **Best Practices to Stay Healthy**

Remember, the best way to prevent the spread of illness is to practice good hand washing and to stay home when you are sick.



If you develop cold or flu-like symptoms, including nasal congestion, fever, or cough call your medical provider or the clinic for advice.

Please call your medical provider or the clinic before taking any over-the-counter medications for cough and cold symptoms in order to ensure safe administration and avoid side effects and drug interactions.

### **Shingrix Clinic**

The Shingrix vaccine is the newer and more effective vaccine to prevent shingles. It is recommended for anyone over 50. Stop & Shop will be offering a Clinic in the Village to administer the Shingrix vaccine in March. There are still a few spaces available. If interested, please contact the Clinic at 781-276-1905 for an appointment.

**Friday, March 13, 2020**

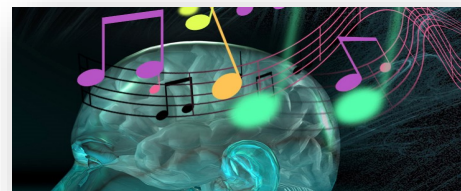
**10:00am—12:30pm**

**Village Center Meeting Room.**



### **Health Education Lecture**

### ***The Power of Music***



**Aline Benoit, MA, CMP**

**Longy School of Music of Bard College**

Join Clarinetist, Aline Benoit for an experiential program on the power of music to heal and inspire. Learn ways to harness this amazing resource for your own wellbeing and enjoyment.

Through lecture and live music performance we'll explore examples of the miraculous impact of music, and learn some ways to harness this amazing resource for your own wellbeing and enjoyment.

**Tuesday February 11, 2020**

**10:30am — 11:30am**

**Auditorium Center**