

A Pharmacist's Perspective on OTC Analgesia

Pharmacists play an integral role in pain management by assisting patients and prescribers with the selection of over-the-counter (OTC) analgesics.¹ A pharmacist may be the last healthcare professional a patient sees before utilizing an OTC product. Patients often ask pharmacists for advice when selecting OTC analgesics. Therefore, it is important for pharmacists to know what questions to ask patients to help ensure that informed recommendations are made.

The following key considerations can help pharmacists support each patient in selecting and safely using an appropriate OTC analgesic:

1 Assess patient characteristics and medical history.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Evaluate patient characteristics.	Age, ²⁻⁵ gender, ⁶ consumption of 3 or more alcoholic beverages every day, ³ pregnancy or breast-feeding ⁶
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Examine medical history.	Cardiovascular disease, ^{5,7-9} gastrointestinal bleeding, ^{2,3,5,10} kidney disease, ^{11,12} liver disease, ^{5,6} asthma ^{13,14}
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Identify medication use.	Ibuprofen plus low-dose aspirin, ¹⁵⁻¹⁷ nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) plus anticoagulants, ¹⁸ NSAIDs plus steroids, ¹⁹ acetaminophen plus warfarin, ³ multiple medications containing the same ingredient or class of ingredient ^{6,20}

2 Explain the recommendation to the patient.

 Remember that the patient may be familiar with name brands but not active ingredients; therefore, it may be beneficial to refer to a drug by both its trade name and generic name.

Discuss expectations for pain relief.



A pain-free state can only be achieved with anesthesia, but OTC medication can decrease the duration and intensity of pain.

Review the dosing of the recommended product to help ensure that the product is used appropriately.



It may be more effective to specify the dosing schedule in terms of time, rather than frequency, to help prevent the patient from redosing too soon.

For example, 6 AM, 2 PM, and 10 PM, instead of 3 times per day

3 Ensure that the patient understands the recommendation was individualized.

Detail why a particular choice of OTC analgesic was made and how it was personalized.

To help ensure that all products are used appropriately, explain how the patient assessment impacts other OTC medication that the patient may be taking.

“We have a world of generic drugs, but no generic patients. Every patient requires specific considerations and an individualized recommendation.”



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