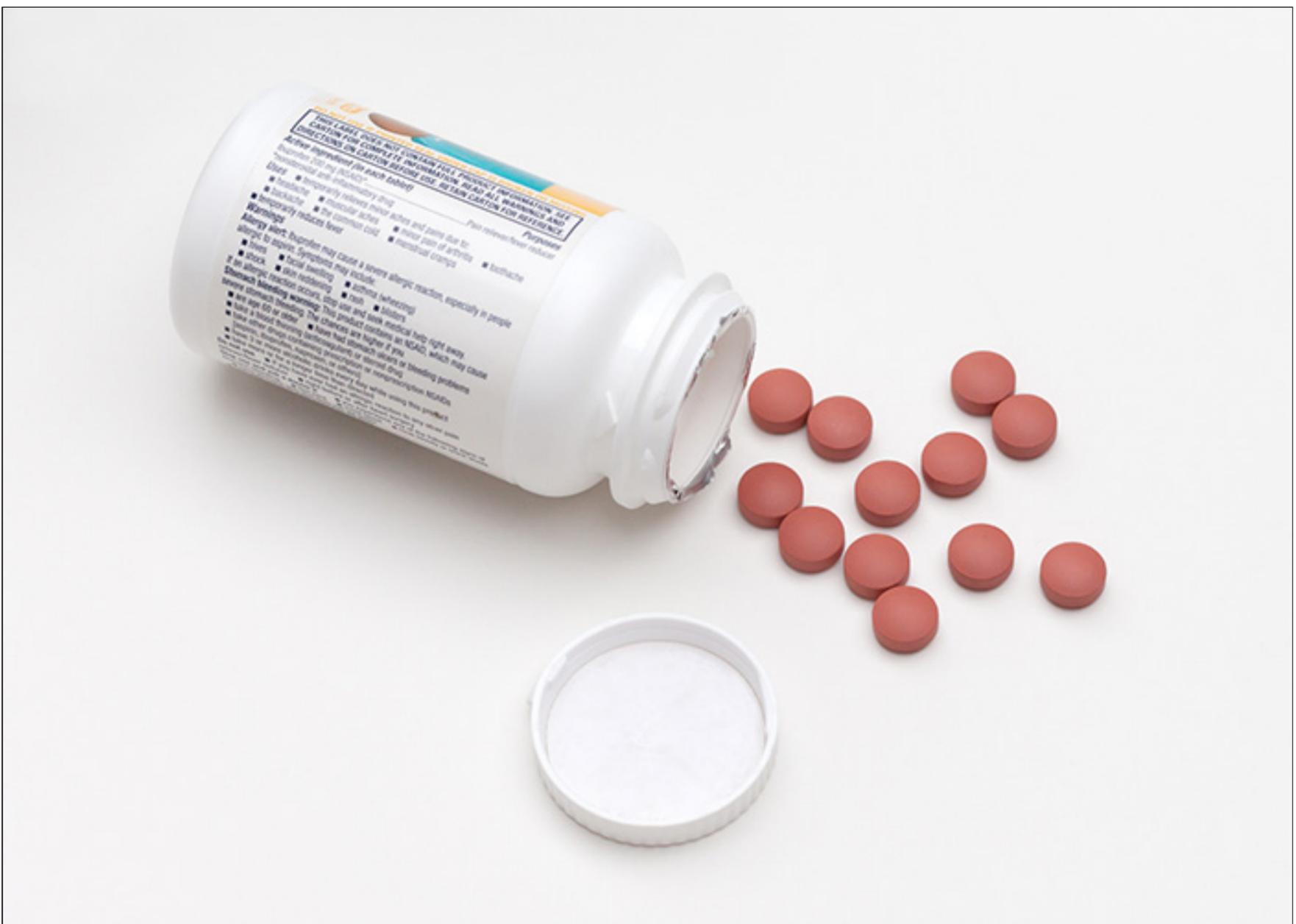




Using Pain Medications Safely



Healthy people who take over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers as directed have few risks. However, because these drugs are so popular, thousands of Americans have bad side effects every year. Don't let these concerns prevent you from taking the drugs if you need them. But do follow these precautions, especially if you take pain relievers often:

- Try nondrug treatments for back pain first. It's easier to pop a pill, but using heat, ice, and exercise may work just as well or even better.
- Talk to your doctor about which pain reliever is best for you. Weigh the potential risks and benefits. This is especially important if you have heart disease (or are at high risk for it) or uncontrolled high blood pressure (hypertension). This is also important if you drink moderately or heavily.
- Consider acetaminophen first, then naproxen. The best choice depends on the cause and severity of your pain, along with your medical history. Acetaminophen is safest for the gastrointestinal tract. But it may not provide enough relief because it doesn't reduce inflammation like nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs NSAIDs do. Your doctor may recommend a prescription drug instead of long-term use or high doses of OTC products.
- Take the lowest effective dose for the shortest time possible. This is regardless of the pain reliever.
- Do not exceed the doses listed on the labels or take for more than 10 days. This is unless your doctor has instructed otherwise.

Medication adherence

The World Health Organization defines medication adherence as "the degree to which the person's behavior corresponds with the agreed recommendations from a health care provider." Poor adherence to prescribed regimens can result in serious health impacts including

hospitalization and death.

About half of all medications for chronic diseases are not taken correctly. People change or skip doses, stop too soon, don't take them at all, or never fill their prescriptions.

What to do when you get a new medication:

- Take notes on what your doctor tells you about the medication.
- Double check with the pharmacist on how to take the medication.
- Ask questions to make sure you fully understand the medication. Be clear about when and how to take it.
- Creating a chart for your daily medication regimen can help you stay on track. So might a pill box with multiple sections. This is helpful if you take more than one medication. This is also helpful if you take medications more than once a day.
- If you're being treated for a chronic condition, check regularly with your doctor about whether you are taking the medication(s) correctly.
- If you are concerned about or are experiencing side effects, talk to your doctor.
- Do not take yourself off of medications without the knowledge and guidance of your doctor.
- If you're having trouble sticking to your medication, for any reason, talk with your doctor. They may be able to suggest other treatments or refer you to services that can help.

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