

Louisiana Pharmacists Association

450 Laurel Street, Suite 1400, Baton Rouge, LA 70801

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Julie Fuselier / Crystal Carter

Phone: 225/346-6883

FAX: 225/344-1132

**Louisiana Pharmacists Association Educates Patients about Over-the-Counter Medications
for the Cold and Flu Season**

Cough and Cold season has arrived. It can be difficult to choose between the overwhelming amount of over-the-counter (OTC) medication. Always remember that the pharmacist can help. Not only with the choice between products, but also in sorting out if what you have is a common cold or the flu.

Should I take a decongestant or an antihistamine?

Decongestants help to relieve nasal and sinus congestion. Decongestants such as Sudafed® directly stimulate receptors that cause a tightening of the vessels in the nose and sinuses and this in turn decreases swelling and congestion.⁽³⁾ Decongestants can also cause a big increase in heart rate. Other common side effects include lightheadedness, increased blood pressure, nervousness, and restlessness.^(2,3) Check with your pharmacist to see if this is the right drug to help relieve your particular symptoms.

Antihistamines relieve watery eyes, itchy throat, runny noses, and postnasal drips.^(2,3) This class of drugs are better at controlling allergies than cold symptoms. Benadryl® and similar medications cause drowsiness and can affect coordination and mental awareness. Because of this effect, antihistamines are often included in preparations that offer to aid sleep when you have

a cold. Check with your pharmacist to see if this is the right drug to help relieve your particular symptoms.

Can I take a decongestant if I have high blood pressure?

Decongestants increase a person's blood pressure, pressures inside the eye, heart rate, blood sugar, make benign prostatic hypertrophy worse and can seriously worsen the symptoms of an overactive thyroid gland. If a person's blood pressure is usually normal and they do not have high blood pressure or heart problems, decongestants are unlikely to cause a problem. A person who has diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, glaucoma, thyroid disease, or difficulty in urination due to enlarged prostate gland should only take decongestants if their underlying condition is well controlled and they have discussed this use with their primary care provider.

How often should I use nasal spray if I have a cold or flu?

You should only use a nasal spray when it is absolutely necessary. Nasal decongestants open breathing passages extremely fast and are extremely effective. But at or about three consecutive days of use, nasal decongestants cause rebound congestion. Rebound congestion symptoms include long-term redness and swelling inside the nose and an increased runny nose. The remedy is a "cold turkey" stop.^(2,4) Check with your pharmacist to see if this is the right drug to help relieve your particular symptoms.

Should I take cough medication? Should I take a cough suppressant or a cough expectorant?

Coughing is a reflex that can help clear the upper most part of the bronchial tree.⁽²⁾ Patients with a productive cough can use an expectorant. In theory, a cough expectorant can help to thin and loosen the mucus in order for the mucus to be cleared more efficiently.⁽²⁾ There is little evidence that this lessens or shortens the experience of the common cold however. Check with your pharmacist to see if this is the right drug to help relieve your particular symptoms.

I'm diabetic, what medications should I take? What special considerations should I take?

Being sick can also affect a person's blood glucose level and diabetic patients should be reminded to monitor their blood glucose levels more frequently, every 3 to 4 hours or as directed.^(5,6) Decongestants may also elevate the blood glucose level in diabetic patients and should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Most "diabetic" remedies are sugar-free versions of "sugar-based" remedies. In general, if a person is in good control then sugar vs. sugar-free is a nonissue and many "sugar-free" remedies if over-consumed will cause diarrhea. Remember that the pharmacist is always present to answer any questions concerning over-the-counter medications.

References:

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Authors:

Kelly Giardina, PharmD Candidate, Class of 2016

William R. Kirchain, PharmD, CDE

Xavier University of LA College of Pharmacy

The Louisiana Pharmacists Association, established in 1882, strives to promote the interests of all pharmacists of the State of Louisiana. For more information about the LPA and its benefits, contact Julie Fuselier or Phyllis Perron, LPA Co-Executive Directors at 225/346-6883 or visit our website at www.louisianapharmacists.com.

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