

How to alternate acetaminophen and ibuprofen



What are acetaminophen and ibuprofen?

Acetaminophen and ibuprofen are medicines often used to treat fever or pain.

- The brand name for acetaminophen is Tylenol.
- The brand names for ibuprofen are Motrin and Advil.
- You may find less costly store brands.

Acetaminophen and ibuprofen work in different ways. Sometimes your child's doctor may tell you to alternate, or rotate, these medicines to help control fever or pain.

Note: Cough and cold medicines often have acetaminophen or ibuprofen in them. Some prescription pain medicines, like Norco and Lortab, have acetaminophen in them. Do not give any of these medicines on top of regular acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

How much should I give?

- Always read the label on the bottle or box. Give the dose based on your child's weight.
- Ask your child's nurse, doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- Do not give:
 - Acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months without a doctor's advice.
 - Ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months without a doctor's advice.

How often should I give it?

- Most often, you can give:
 - Acetaminophen every 6 hours as needed.
 - Ibuprofen every 6 hours as needed.
- You may alternate them every 3 hours if told to do so.
- Do not give both medicines at the same time or give them more often than advised.

Example of how to alternate:

- 6 am in the morning - give ibuprofen
- 9 am in the morning - give acetaminophen
- 12 pm at midday - give ibuprofen
- 3 pm in the afternoon - give acetaminophen
- 6 pm in the evening - give ibuprofen
- Continue as needed or advised

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if:

- You have questions or concerns about the medicine or dose.
- Your child needs acetaminophen or ibuprofen for more than 3 days for fever or pain that is not from surgery.
- Your child has symptoms you were told to call about in their hospital, surgery or clinic instructions.

This teaching sheet contains general information only.

Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.