

COLD AND COUGH MEDICATION GUIDE

Many parents have stood in the medicine aisle at the local drug store staring at the many different options. Choosing between cough suppressants, expectorants, antihistamines and decongestants or any possible combination of these can literally give parents a headache. As a pediatrician and a parent, I've tried to design a helpful guide to help you sort your way through the many cold medications. Choosing the right medication. Choosing the correct medication is easier if you understand your child's symptoms and how **cold and cough** medications work. Here is a quick review.

- **Treat your child's specific symptoms:** If your child simply has a bad cough, but no nasal congestion, then you probably don't need a multi-symptom cough and cold medication. You only need a cough suppressant.

- If your child's cold symptoms are not interfering with his sleep or daily activity, then you probably don't need to use medication. Often the most effective treatments for colds are "non-medical" such as nasal saline spray, hot steam and simply drinking plenty of fluids. Click to [learn](#) about "natural cold treatments".

Four major cold medication ingredients: Cough and cold medications come either as one of the following types of medicines, or a combination of two, three or all four ingredients:

- **Nasal decongestant** – This will clear nasal passages making it easier to breathe through the nose. It also has a mild drying effect so it will also help relieve runny nose a bit. I like to use decongestants during the day because they won't make your child drowsy. This is important if your child is going to school. Side effects may include excitability, which might interfere with sleep.

- **Anti-histamine** – This helps relieve a very itchy, runny nose. It decreases mucous production in the nose. The most likely side effect is drowsiness, which is fine at night, but could interfere with daytime activities.

- **Cough suppressant** – this helps with a persistent annoying cough. It acts by suppressing the cough reflex in the throat and lungs so that the mucous or irritation there won't trigger coughing. There are no likely side effects.

- **Expectorant** – this helps when your child has thick chest congestion, which he is unable to cough up. It loosens thick mucous, making it easier to cough up. There are no likely side effects.

Helpful Tip: The brand name of the medication is not important, and don't get confused by the long scientific names of the ingredients. Under the name brand on the front label will be listed the types of ingredients (i.e. decongestant, cough suppressant, etc) that are in the bottle. This should make your buying decision easier. Also, it is okay to use more than one medicine at a time, as long as you are not overlapping any of the above four types of medications. For example: you could use an antihistamine/decongestant combination along with a cough suppressant/expectorant combination.

Warning: All four types of cough and cold medications are **NO LONGER APPROVED** for kids younger than 2 years of age.

All bottles of cold and cough meds that have dosing labels for kids under 2 have been taken off the shelves and are no longer available. The reason for this is two-fold: First, there have been a number of infants and young children harmed by accidental overdoses of these meds when a parent mixed different meds together OR gave too high a dose, this is the reason that the FDA decided to step in and make them no longer available. Second, there has been very little research done on young kids to prove that cold and cough meds are safe and/or effective. Even though they seem to work well and rarely cause any problems when dosed properly, the FDA felt it was prudent to put a hold on their use until further safety and efficacy data become available. And we agree.

In addition, the FDA is considering removing cough and cold meds for kids age 2 to 5, and possibly ages 6 to 11 as well, due to the lack of safety and efficacy research in these age groups. The decision for these ages is expected to come in February 2008.