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## **2014 8.19 Health Matters Tylenol Update**

This is Health Matters, with an update on Tylenol, the most popular pain reliever and fever reducer on the market.

Tylenol first appeared in the fifties as an effective painkiller and fever reducer for children. Around that time, it was discovered that aspirin given to children and teenagers with viral infections could cause Reye's Syndrome. Reye's Syndrome is a serious disorder impacting the liver and the brain and can have long-term consequences.. Tylenol proved to be a safe alternative. Today, Tylenol is a billion-dollar-a-year industry. Americans take over 8 billion over-the-counter Tylenol pills a year. They take vast amounts of compound medications that contain Tylenol. These compounds include both over-the-counter and prescription medications.

The manufacturers of Tylenol claim it is a safer alternative to aspirin and other anti-inflammatory painkillers. And physicians agree. Tylenol does not produce the stomach discomfort or bleeding associated with aspirin or ibuprofen. It does not pose the threat of Reye's syndrome when taken by young people. Nevertheless, Tylenol does pose risks when taken in quantities that exceed the doses recommended on the label. Tylenol is, in fact, the leading cause of acute liver failure and liver transplants in the United States. Tylenol overdoses cause more than 60,000 visits to emergency rooms a year, and hundreds of death every year. There have been numerous lawsuits against Johnson & Johnson from plaintiffs suffering severe liver damage from Tylenol. In 2009, the FDA, the Federal Drug Authority, issued packaging guidelines that listed overdose symptoms.

Tylenol overdose symptoms can be vague, and therefore hard to identify. They include nausea, vomiting, headache and flu-like symptoms. Sometimes, Tylenol overdose symptoms can feel like you're coming down with a cold. It is precisely because these symptoms are often treated with flu-relieving Tylenol compounds that overdose reactions can move from serious to life-threatening.

For example, liver damage can occur when people unwittingly take both Tylenol and cold or flu-relieving compounds that contain Tylenol. The problem is that Tylenol is listed as Acetaminophen (ah-seat-ah-MIN-ah-fin) in these compounds. Tylenol is a brand name. Acetaminophen is the generic name for this drug. Labels for compounds containing Tylenol list the drug as Acetaminophen. If you don't know that Acetaminophen is the same as Tylenol, how can you know that combining Tylenol with Theraflu every four hours could land you in the hospital with acute liver failure? Because both of these brand-name, over-the-counter medications contain Acetaminophen.

There are 23 Tylenol over-the-counter products; many of them for children, and there are 30 over-the-counter compound medications that contain Acetaminophen along with 15 prescription compounds that contain Acetaminophen. Again, if you don't know that Acetaminophen is Tylenol, you can exceed the recommended limit. Some of the more popular over-the-counter compounds containing Acetaminophen include: Excedrin, Actifed, Benadryl, Dayquil, Midol, Anacin and Sudafed. But, as we've said, there are 30 of them altogether.

The daily recommended dosage for Acetaminophen or Tylenol is 4,000 mcgs. If you take two 500-mcg extra-strength Tylenol pills four times a day, that's the limit your liver can handle. Exceeding the limit of Tylenol or Acetaminophen can damage other organs as well. Because severe liver damage is a very real risk from a Tylenol overdose, it's essential to know what drugs are included in any pain reliever compound you take. Look for Acetaminophen in the list of ingredients when using over-the-counter compounds for relieving pain and fever. Don't combine a compound containing Acetaminophen with a Tylenol product.

And remember, there are 15 prescription medications that contain Acetaminophen, including Percocet and Vicodin. It's very unlikely that patients would take Tylenol on top of these prescription pain-killers, but if they took cold or flu medications with Acetaminophen along with Percocet, for example, they might exceed the limit the body can handle.

Like any drug, Tylenol must be used with caution and with full knowledge of the recommended limit. As was recently reported in the Two Rivers Tribune, Tylenol has been linked to Attention Deficit Disorder in children whose mothers took Tylenol when they were pregnant. Tylenol has also been linked to liver problems in children whose mothers took Tylenol when they were pregnant. The bottom line? Know the generic name of any drug you're taking and how it interacts with other drugs.

## **Sources and Links**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2014/01/16/fda-warns-high-doses-of-acetaminophen-can-lead-to-liver-damage/>

[http://www.medicinenet.com/tylenol\\_liver\\_damage/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/tylenol_liver_damage/article.htm)

<http://www.tworivertribune.com/2014/03/health-front-add-linked-to-tylenol-use-during-pregnancy/>