

Prescription for PRN OTC Medications Instructions and Notes

For anyone that requires assistance with medications, a prescription or order from the physician or other medical provider must be obtained even for over-the-counter medications or other products that require assistance.* Many of the products or OTC medications are purchased by the individual and therefore a written prescription is not obtained from the medical provider. However each OTC medication/product must have a protocol or set of instructions for use and should contain the following:

1. Name of the individual
2. Name and dose of the prn OTC medication with route of administration
3. Under what conditions the medication is to be used.
4. The frequency of use and if applicable, a maximum dosage within a 24 hour period
5. Specific instructions which may include when to notify the medical provider

These instructions do not need to be written out on separate protocol sheets as long as the order has the information as listed above. Each OTC product must have the name of the person for whom it is to be used attached to the container (initials of the person are not adequate).

All PRN OTC medications must be documented on the Medication Administration Record (MAR) the same way that every other medication is documented. This needs to be done at the time the medication is taken by the individual. The MAR should ideally have a place to write other notes such as indication for giving medication and the response to the medication.

Since medical providers may not want to write out several orders for PRN OTC medications, the following forms may be used. The medical provider can simply mark “yes” or “no” to each different product and sign the bottom of each sheet. The same sheet can be used for three years in a row as all medications must be renewed at least yearly.

Changes can be made on the form by the medical provider. Also, prior to taking these forms to the medical provider, they can be individualized and the specific medications may be changed to fit the needs of each person. However, the format for these orders must remain the same and the information regarding what, how much, and when to use them must remain in place to fulfill the protocol or set of instructions as described above.

*Health and Medication Administration Manual, pages 16, 17, 22, 23.

Why is using specific products with specific instructions so important? Many OTC products especially cold medications, sleep aides, and pain medications contain more than one ingredient. If care is not taken when purchasing these and following the directions for specific ingredients, potentially fatal doses could be accidentally taken.

The following example is extreme but does illustrate this point.

The following of the maximum recommended 24 hour doses for common medications contained in OTC cold and flu products.

Acetaminophen 3000 to 3250 mg/24 hours

Phenylephrine 60 mg/24 hours

Dextromethorphan 120 mg/24 hours

So if someone had a serious cold/flu and was supposed to take a decongestant (phenylephrine), a cough suppressant (dextromethorphan), and an expectorant (guaifenesin) but combination medications were accidentally purchased instead of products containing only one ingredient, that person would be getting:

Tylenol Cold & Flu (as a decongestant) – 2 every 4 hours prn

Acetaminophen 325 mg

Dextromethorphan 10 mg

Guaifenesin 200 mg

Phenylephrine 5 mg

Robitussin Severe Multi-system (cough suppressant) 20 ml every 4 hours

Acetaminophen 650 mg

Dextromethorphan 20 mg

Guaifenesin 400 mg

Phenylephrine 10 mg

Mucinex Fast-Max (expectorant) – 2 every 4 hrs prn

Acetaminophen 325 mg

Guaifenesin 200 mg

Phenylephrine 5 mg

If all three products were taken at the same time, it would mean that the following amounts were taken:

Acetaminophen 1625 mg

Dextromethorphan 40 mg

Phenylephrine 30 mg

This clearly shows that the recommended dose in 24 hours would be reached after just 2 doses for acetaminophen and phenylephrine and in 3 doses for dextromethorphan. If these medications were taken 4 to 6 times in one day, a fatal dose could quickly be reached.

Paying attention to each ingredient in OTC preparations is important and is just one reason that a prescription for their specific use is required.