



# THE FAMILY PHARMACIST

A QUICK READ FOR YOUR OTC NEED!

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 5

MAY 15, 2021

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## OVER-THE-COUNTER AND PRESCRIPTION TRAVELERS' MEDICATIONS

As of this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic in the US is showing signs of letting up, and as more people are vaccinated we are once again beginning to travel. CDC's website states: "People who are fully vaccinated with an FDA-authorized vaccine or a vaccine authorized for emergency use by the World Health Organization can travel safely within the United States." Requirements for international travel are a little different. Even fully vaccinated travelers must follow CDC guidelines for both domestic and international travel. Guidelines are posted on CDC.gov.

If you do decide to travel, one aspect of preparing for your trip should include giving consideration to the medicines you will take on your journey. Prescription drugs are a no-brainer to remember, but what about over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and personal care items? It's no fun to be in a distant location or a foreign country late at night and need some personal drug store item only to realize that your special item isn't sold there or everything is closed. So it helps to know the most common maladies that affect travelers. These are travelers' diarrhea, upset stomach, allergy, bug bites, sunburn, motion sickness or nausea, cough, sore throat, congestion, pain, and urinary tract infections (women). The purpose of this newsletter is to consider minor and short-term medical inconveniences for which medicine might give you quick and temporary relief. Since as many as 70% of travelers experience travelers' diarrhea, it is number one on the list.

**Travelers' diarrhea.** The source of this illness is from organisms usually ingested in food and beverages. Bacteria are responsible for 80% to 90% of cases, viruses cause 5% to 8%, and parasites account for up to 10% of all travelers' diarrhea infections. Most of the time whatever is causing the travelers' diarrhea is not identified. Those who are at the greatest risk for this affliction are people venturing to high-risk areas in foreign countries (Africa, Central or South America, Mexico, most of Asia, and the Middle East). Also backpackers and young adults who participate in adventure tours are at high risk.

Travelers' diarrhea is best prevented by good hand hygiene, including thorough

washing with soap and the use of an alcohol hand sanitizer when soap isn't available. If you are traveling abroad, drink purified water and avoid raw or undercooked meat or seafood. Don't eat raw fruits or vegetables unless you can peel them before eating. Although very unpleasant and disruptive, travelers' diarrhea usually resolves without treatment in 3 to 7 days. But that's a long time when you're on vacation, and since travelers' diarrhea can be effectively self-managed, consider the following suggestions.

**OTC medicine for travelers' diarrhea.** If you're traveling to a high-risk area, Pepto-Bismol (*bismuth subsalicylate*) can prevent mild diarrhea by 50% to 65%. But it has some unpleasant properties. It may discolor the tongue or stool black (which is harmless) and may cause nausea and constipation. Plus it has to be taken four times daily. If you don't want to take it as a preventive, it can also be used to treat mild travelers' diarrhea after it starts. Another OTC drug to treat travelers' diarrhea is Imodium® (generic, *loperamide*). It is more effective and works quicker than Pepto Bismol. Follow the directions for Imodium® carefully to avoid side effects and don't take more than two 2 mg tablets in 24 hours. It's important to stay hydrated while treating travelers' diarrhea and taking these medicines.

**Prescription antibiotics for travelers' diarrhea.** In general, prescription antibiotics are not recommended for the prevention of travelers' diarrhea by health care professionals for various reasons. But if you are traveling to a high-risk area there are several prescription medicines used to treat travelers' diarrhea. Some of these drugs are only effective for the most common bacterial cause of diarrhea (*E. coli* strains), but other antibiotics are broader in effectiveness and will work on more bugs that cause travelers' diarrhea. So if you're traveling to a high-risk area, or if you have a medical condition or certain situation that makes you high-risk, ask your doctor about having three days of a prescription antibiotic on hand before you travel.

**Upset stomach and gas.** Tums® or Rolaids® in small travel rolls and Pepcid Com-

plete® are good to have in case of acid indigestion. These antacids treat simple heartburn due to dietary indiscretion, like overeating and late-night pizza and beer. While important when you're traveling, they should be used only on occasion and not taken routinely. *Intestinal gas* can also be a result of what you eat and swallowing too much air when you eat. The only OTC ingredient to specifically treat gas cramps is *simethicone*, found in products like Gas-X® and Phazyme®. Simethicone is not an antacid. It simply breaks down gas bubbles so they can be eliminated by belching or passing gas.

**Allergy.** Most people with allergies get pretty good at managing their symptoms and being prepared for a vacation. Prescription drugs are a must to remember. If you're fortunate enough to be able to manage your allergies with OTC medicines, don't forget your Claritin, Zyrtec, or whatever else it is you take.

**Bug bites.** Whether you prefer DEET or picaridin (DEET and picaridin are applied to the skin), or permethrin (applied to clothing and gear), just take something to protect against bugs and bug bites. Benadryl® Itch Relief Stick is great to have around for dabbing to the skin after you get a bug bite. It contains an antihistamine and an astringent to stop itching fast.

**Sunburn.** SPF sunscreen lotion or cream in a travel-size container is important to keep handy on a trip. You really don't need anything higher than SPF 30. Just reapply it during the day, especially if you are around water. Many brands make an SPF 15 or 30 sunscreen moisturizer for lip care as well.

**Motion sickness.** Nausea, vomiting, and sometimes dizziness caused by motion can be prevented by taking Bonine® or Dramamine®. Cruise ships sell these medicines in their gift shops at a very high price. So bring your own just in case. These OTC drugs are very effective for motion sickness. Because they are antihistamines, they may cause drowsiness. There is also Dramamine®

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for Kids, available as chewable tablets, which can be used in children as young as 2 years. You might want to consider a non-drug approach to motion sickness. Some people claim relief by using a pair of acupressure wristbands, such as those made by Sea-Band.<sup>®</sup> It may be worth a try. There are also OTC herbal products, like ginger chewing gum, but most research shows that oral ginger does not prevent or treat motion sickness.

**Cough.** Remember, we're talking about a simple cough caused by a temporary condition. So cough drops that contain only *menthol* are great to relieve a scratchy throat or dry mouth caused by environmental factors while you are traveling. Include a small package of Halls<sup>®</sup> Relief or Ricola<sup>®</sup> Natural Herb Cough Drops in your purse or toiletry bag.

**Sore throat.** This can be a sign of serious illness and difficult to deal with while out-of-town. But if a scratchy and itchy throat is merely due to allergies or environmental conditions, you can get some comforting relief from an anesthetic lozenge like Chloraseptic<sup>®</sup> Sore Throat Lozenges which contain *menthol* and *benzocaine*, a local anesthetic. These may be particularly helpful before bedtime when an irritated throat may keep you from falling asleep.

**Congestion.** If you use the decongestant Sudafed<sup>®</sup> or its generic, *pseudoephedrine*, make sure you take it with you when you travel because it may be hard to purchase when you're out-of-town. Due to pseudoephedrine's abuse potential, it's kept behind the pharmacy counter and you have to ask for it. Some states and many cities now require a prescription to purchase it. Most OTC decongestants don't work, so you don't want to buy something in a pinch that isn't going to help your congestion. The nasal spray Afrin<sup>®</sup> is also good to have on hand for congestion since it works locally and immediately on your nasal passages to relieve congestion. Afrin<sup>®</sup> also works well to prevent pressure from building up in your ears in an airplane. If you're troubled with this, spray once or twice in each nostril one hour before you board the plane.

**Pain.** Tylenol<sup>®</sup> (*acetaminophen*), Motrin<sup>®</sup> and Advil<sup>®</sup> (*ibuprofen*), and Aleve<sup>®</sup> (*naproxen*) can be purchased in travel-size containers in tubes of 10 or 12 tablets or capsules. For minor discomfort caused by an inflammatory condition like a dental procedure or an injury on your trip, it's OK to try a combination of ibuprofen 400 mg *plus* acetaminophen 500 to 1000 mg every 6 hours for a few doses during the day, but only for a day or two. After that, only take as needed and not for more than another couple of days.

**Urinary tract infection (UTI).** Women travelers who are prone to urinary tract infections should consider being prepared for a UTI occurrence. Two medicines are important to have on hand. One is *phenazopyridine*, found in OTC products like AZO<sup>®</sup> Urinary Pain Relief Maximum Strength. This drug quickly relieves the burning pain of a UTI. Second, ask your physician (who most likely knows your situation) for a prescription antibiotic in case of an emergency. There are several medicines for this purpose. You might also want to take along some over-the-counter test strips, like AZO<sup>®</sup> Urinary Tract Infection Test Strips. They are FDA approved to help those who have infections that are recurrent (keep coming back) and are uncomplicated. Even though the symptoms are familiar to those who have them, a positive test will confirm your need for the antibiotic.

Additional suggestions that can be purchased in travel/trial sizes†		
Lysol <sup>®</sup> To Go disinfectant spray	1 oz	Surface disinfectant
Pepto Bismol <sup>®</sup> chewable tablets 262 mg	12 or 30 tablets per box	Travelers diarrhea
Imodium <sup>®</sup> Anti-Diarrheal caplets	12 caplets (generic, 6 caplets)	Travelers' diarrhea
Tums <sup>®</sup> tablets 750 mg calcium carbonate	8 tablets per bottle	Indigestion/heartburn
Off botanicals <sup>®</sup> plant based insect repellent	2 fluid oz	Bug repellent
Repel <sup>®</sup> Sportsmen Max (40% DEET)	0.475 fluid oz spray pump	Bug repellent
Benadryl <sup>®</sup> Itch Relief Stick	0.47 fluid oz	Bug bite relief
Eucerin <sup>®</sup> lotion	1 fluid oz	Dry skin, wind burn
Dramamine <sup>®</sup> 50 mg tablets	4 tablets per box	Motion sickness
Tylenol <sup>®</sup> caplets	10 caplets per tube	Pain relief
Aleve <sup>®</sup> tablets	10 tablets per tube	Pain relief
Systane <sup>®</sup> Lubricant Eye Drops	0.1 fluid oz	Dry eye relief
Gentleal <sup>®</sup> Tears Lubricant Eye Drops	36 single use vials (for travel)	Dry eye relief
Band-Aid <sup>®</sup> adhesive bandages	8 bandages per pack	First aid
CVS Travel First Aid Kit	30 pieces	Bandages and antiseptic wipes for travel first aid

† Stores like CVS Pharmacies and Bed Bath & Beyond have a section just for travel/trial size products