

Government Considers Stronger Warning Labels for Tylenol

Extra Dose of Tylenol Can be Deadly

Taking More Than Recommended, Even Once, Can Cause Liver Failure

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THIS AUTHOR NOTES. IN PART:

"Plagued by nagging colds, sore backs, throbbing heads and life's other aches and pains, millions of people reach for Tylenol."

"And if one dose doesn't stop the pain, maybe two or three will."

"If you do that, you're courting trouble: An overdose of acetaminophen, the popular painkiller in Tylenol and other brands, sends thousands of U.S. residents to the hospital each year, killing hundreds."

For years, acetaminophen overdose has been the main reason people call poison-control centers. "It's the leading cause of death in poison-control cases."

Studies show overdoses of acetaminophen [Tylenol, etc.] have become the nation's chief cause of acute liver failure. "Up to half of these poisonings appear to be accidental."

"The federal government is considering more-severe warning labels on over-the-counter acetaminophen drugs."

"Nobody should ever exceed 4,000 milligrams [of acetaminophen] per day."

The daily maximum equals eight Extra Strength Tylenols.

"Doctors worry that some overdoses stem from people who combine several of the 600-plus-milligram acetaminophen drugs and don't realize how much they're ingesting."

If you regularly have three or more alcoholic drinks in a day, you may develop problems at lower doses of acetaminophen or other painkillers.

Acetaminophen is the nation's most popular medicine.

"About a fifth of U.S. adults, or 45 million people, take acetaminophen in any week."

"Nearly 10 percent of U.S. residents under 18 take acetaminophen in any week, roughly 7 million kids."

A serious acetaminophen overdose can creep up: A person may feel fine, maybe just nauseated, for a day or two before the crisis hits.

"Acetaminophen was the reason for 133,000 calls to U.S. poison-control centers in 2004. More than half of those cases needed treatment in a healthcare facility."

ER doctors can treat acetaminophen overdoses in the first 12 to 24 hours.

"Overdoses increasingly cause acute liver failure, a disastrous organ collapse that hits quickly."

Years ago, hepatitis was the main cause of this life-threatening condition, which strikes about 2,000 U.S. residents each year. But acetaminophen is now the No. 1 cause of liver failure.

Acetaminophen caused 42 percent of the acute liver failures in the 1998-2003 study [Acetaminophen-induced acute liver failure: Results of a United States multicenter, prospective study; *Hepatology* (American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases), Volume 42, Issue 6, December 2005, Pages 1364-1372], including 51 percent in the final year.

"Roughly half of acetaminophen overdoses seemed accidental. Those patients said they took an average of 7,500 milligrams a day, usually for less than a week."