

Orthopaedic Connection

Acetaminophen: Too Much Of A Good Thing

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Acetaminophen has been a mainstay of pain relief for years. When used correctly and within safe dosage guidelines it is still the safest nonprescription pain reliever available. At usual doses in healthy people acetaminophen has virtually no adverse effects.

But taking more than the recommended dose - even a little more can result in serious or fatal liver damage.

Notice that in the previous paragraph I said **healthy people**. A very sizable number of patients I am treating for musculoskeletal problems are **not healthy**. They have other things wrong and are also often taking a number of medications.

Maximum Dose

Maximum dose for adults per 24 hours is 4000mg. That would be eight extra strength Tylenol tablets.

If you are over 60, regularly consume alcohol, and/or have liver problems maximum dose for you is 3,250mg.

There is much variation in how people handle the toxic metabolite of acetaminophen. It is why some people can take a lot more Tylenol than others and it doesn't bother them.

Alcohol Effect

Consumption of alcohol lowers the threshold for acetaminophen liver damage. Any liver damage that you might not even know about can get worse if you take too much Tylenol (acetaminophen). You can't be too careful. Most of us have no clue what our liver function tests would show. But we go right ahead drinking and sometimes taking too much Tylenol.

Combination Products

Acetaminophen is in everything, well most everything. I have a list of 55 prescriptions and over the counter (OTC) medications that contain acetaminophen. Gulp!

Lack Of Awareness

You may not know if you are taking too much if you take a fair amount of Tylenol and some other medication that contains acetaminophen.

Lack of awareness is the major factor I find in my patients who are overusing acetaminophen. Everyone knows the active ingredient in Tylenol is acetaminophen. Some know it is found in combination with drugs used for colds, flu and allergies. It is also combined with many of the prescription pain relievers such as Vicodin and Percocet.

An alarming number of my patients are clueless about how much additional acetaminophen they are taking in over the counter (OTC) medication that they choose to take which I didn't prescribe! It's scary. 42 OTC medications contain acetaminophen.

Acetaminophen Safety

Go back to the beginning of the article and stay as far as you can below the maximum dose.

Be kind to your liver. Remember the upper doses are for healthy people.

Realistically a large proportion of my patients are not healthy and they are already taking a bunch of other medications. You and your family have to check this out and not assume your doctor is doing it. Patients see more than one doctor. Things get overlooked.

I am concerned about your bones, joints, muscles, tendons, nerves, etc. But I am also concerned about your liver!

Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive

www.orthopodsurgeon.com and Your Orthopaedic Connection provide all the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information you need! And you can reach the Archive of all GCH previous articles through the website. All past articles are listed by title and the complete text is available at the click of a mouse.

All of the information available concerns what I treat daily in the office and hospital. Log on and check it out.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush