

When should I take: acetaminophen vs. ibuprofen?

While both acetaminophen and ibuprofen provide relief, these popular pain medications treat different ailments. Find out which remedy is best for you and how to take it correctly.



ACETAMINOPHEN
(Tylenol)



IBUPROFEN
(Advil or Motrin)

Pain Relief

Best for



Headaches



Lowering fever

Best for



Muscle aches
and joint pain



Inflammation
and swelling



Menstrual pain

Possible Side Effects



- Upset stomach
- Skin rash and blisters

Warning: Stop taking immediately if a rash occurs.



- Heartburn
- Stomach pain

Tip: Take with food to help prevent upset stomach and ulcers.

Toxicity



- Potential liver damage



- Increased risk of heart attack or stroke
- Potential kidney damage

Caution

Be cautious of taking cold medications if you've already taken pain medicine. Many cold medications also contain acetaminophen, which may appear abbreviated as "APAP" or "Acetam."

Other over-the-counter products like naproxen (Aleve) are in the same class as ibuprofen and should not be taken together.

WARNING

Do NOT take:



If you drink more than 3 alcoholic drinks per day

Do NOT take:



If you have stomach ulcers or are taking blood pressure medication

From the expert

"Both acetaminophen and ibuprofen are helpful for pain relief and reducing fever. However, ibuprofen also helps reduce swelling, while acetaminophen is generally safer and rarely has side effects. Remember that although both medications are available over-the-counter, each still carries risks. Only take on an as-needed basis and be careful not to exceed the recommended daily maximum dosage."

— Marwah Desoky, lead pharmacist at Sharp Coronado Community Pharmacy

