

Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions®

An Independent Health  company

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Staying healthy as temperatures rise

Warmer weather has arrived, and after extended months of being cooped up inside, many are eager to get back outdoors and enjoy the activities they love. Here are some things to keep in mind as the temperatures warm up and you spend more time outside.

Allergies

Spring and early summer are often the worst time for most allergy sufferers. Symptoms vary and can include itchy eyes, nose or throat; runny or stuffy nose; sneezing; sore throat; watery eyes; headaches; and clogged ears. In addition, allergy sufferers feel “run down” during the height of pollen season. For most people, seasonal allergies are not severe and can be treated with over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Occasional flare-ups of sneezing, watery or itchy eyes and runny nose can be treated with eye drops, non-sedating antihistamines and nasal sprays. Examples include Zyrtec® (cetirizine), Allegra® (fexofenadine), Benadryl® (diphenhydramine), Claritin® (loratadine) and Flonase®.

Sun exposure

With increased time outdoors, it's important to keep in mind that there are dozens of medications and over-the-counter drugs that can cause sun sensitivity. Select medications can affect your ability to stay hydrated and respond appropriately to heat, while others may cause sensitivity to the sun. Some of the most common include select antibiotics and blood pressure drugs, benzoyl peroxide, and select cholesterol drugs (statins), hypoglycemic and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories. Not every person who uses these drugs has a reaction. If it does happen, it can be a one-time occurrence, or it can happen each time the drug is taken and sun exposure occurs. In addition to medication interaction, exposure to sun can cause numerous skin issues, including fine and coarse wrinkles, freckles and possibly pre-cancerous and cancerous skin lesions.



While completely avoiding the sun isn't always possible, if you plan to spend time outdoors, there are some things you can do to help limit exposure. Be sure to wear sunscreen of at least 15-30 SPF, and reapply every two hours. If possible, take breaks from sun exposure by going inside or sitting in the shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are strongest. Wide-brimmed hats, long sleeved shirts and sunglasses can also help protect your body against the sun's harmful effects.

Muscle strains and sprains

If the mercury rising has you lacing up your sneakers for a run, walk or bike ride more often than in winter, you aren't alone. With increased activity comes increased risk for muscle strains and sprains from falls. Sprains are stretched or torn ligaments, while strains are stretches or tears to a muscle or a tendon. Pain and swelling are common signs of both sprains and strains; however, a sprain can bring bruising with it. Most sprains and strains can be managed at home using over-the-counter painkillers to ease any pain. If your injury is minor, consider “PRICE” therapy: Protection, Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation. Also, you should avoid the use of heat on a sprain or strain, and be careful to not perform any other exercise which could cause further damage. As always, contact your healthcare provider if your injury doesn't improve as expected or your symptoms get worse.

Please direct questions or comments you have about the Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions newsletter to:

Lori Allan, Editor
(716) 631-3001 x2304
Lori.Allan@pbdrx.com

Michael Cropp, M.D.
President and CEO
Independent Health

Lynne Olewine
President
Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions

Managing pain while avoiding opioids

Opioid pain medications are most effective in providing relief to patients suffering from severe pain. However, the addictive properties of opioids often pose a serious risk to patients, making them prone to misuse and abuse. With deaths from drug overdoses at an all-time high, the issue of opioid addiction has become a public health crisis in states throughout the nation.

Opioids include medications such as codeine, morphine, hydrocodone and oxycodone. Most often, physicians prescribe opioids when non-narcotic medication is ineffective, or in conjunction with other painkillers. They are most commonly prescribed for patients with cancer, back pain, osteoarthritis and neuropathic pain. Over time, the body can build up a tolerance to these medications, causing patients to require an increased dose or strength of the medicine to effectively treat pain and provide relief.

Because of the serious side effects of opioids, including sedation, dizziness, constipation, and nausea, many individuals may seek alternatives to opioids dependent upon pain levels, including over-the-counter remedies. The most commonly used are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve), acetaminophen (Tylenol) and Aspirin (Bayer). Individuals who suffer from muscle pain may benefit from the use of muscle relaxing creams or oral medications, while those with back pain may wish to seek treatment from a chiropractor, physical therapist or acupuncturist.

If you are prescribed an opioid for severe pain, it's important to take steps to ensure you are using your medication properly. Discuss any concerns with your health care provider and be sure to share any other medications you are taking which could have interactions with opioids. Since there is a high risk of overdose, it is important to always take your medication as directed and not to exceed your daily dose. It is also important to familiarize yourself with the proper storage procedures. Opioids are different from prescriptions, such as antibiotics where you must complete an entire course of treatment; you can discontinue use of opioids if your pain level decreases, or switch to a non-prescription pain medication. Unused opioids should be properly discarded per U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines or at U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration collection sites.

As always, if you have questions about pain management, talk to your health care provider.

NYS electronic prescribing mandate now in effect

As you may know, New York recently implemented an electronic prescribing mandate.

What does this mean for our members? By law, all prescriptions written in New York state, including those for controlled substances, must be transmitted electronically from the prescriber to the pharmacy. These regulations were adopted by the state in an effort to both reduce abuse of painkillers, and to reduce errors when prescriptions are filled. There are special requirements for electronic prescriptions for both prescribers and pharmacists, who must have a secure (encrypted or encoded) system for electronic transmission from computer to computer.

Please keep in mind that faxed prescriptions are not considered electronic, and email prescriptions are also not accepted as they do not meet privacy standards. New York state has set strict guidelines and allows limited exceptions (i.e., temporary power outages or technical failures); therefore, Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions is unable to provide temporary or one-time overrides for members who may have a written paper prescription. If you have questions or inquiries regarding these new state regulations, we encourage you to speak to your health care provider or your pharmacist.

New generic medications now available

Generic medications are safe and effective, lower-cost alternatives to brand-name drugs. For your reference, here are some brand-name medications that recently have had a new generic alternative released to the marketplace.

Brand Name	Generic Name	Category
DIFFERIN SOL®	<i>adapalene sol</i>	Dermatologicals
EXELON®	<i>rivastigmine patch</i>	Miscellaneous Psychotherapeutic and Neurologic Agents
ENABLEX®	<i>darifenacin</i>	Urinary Antispasmodic
EXJADE®	<i>deferasirox tabs</i>	Antidotes
FAZACLO ODT®	<i>clozapine odt</i>	Antipsychotics/Antimanic Agents
GLEEVEC®	<i>imatinib</i>	Antineoplastics and Adjunctive Therapies
LESCOL XL®	<i>fluvastatin XL</i>	Antihyperlipidemics
NAFTIN CREAM®	<i>naftifine 2% cream</i>	Dermatologicals
ORAP®	<i>pimozide</i>	Psychotherapeutic and Neurological Agents
PATANOL 0.1%®	<i>olopatadine 0.1%</i>	Ophthalmic Agents
SAVELLA®	<i>milnacipran</i>	Psychotherapeutic and Neurological Agents
TOVIAZ®	<i>fesoterodine</i>	Urinary Antispasmodics