

Monoamine oxidase inhibitors: ‘Flu & cold’ meds, and alcohol

Flu & cold meds and ‘over-the-counter’ medicines

Avoid those in red & bold (See appendix for brand names)

Cold and flu symptoms

There are many over-the-counter medicines (OTC) sold for cold and flu symptoms. Many are mixtures of various different drugs and it is essential to be aware of what is in any such medicine that you contemplate using.

Doctors usually recommend the following, which are safe with MAOIs

Most over-the-counter medicines are more expensive and no more effective than the ordinary medicines doctors usually recommend.

- Paracetamol for pain and fever
- Ibuprofen (or similar NSAID) for pain and fever
- Decongestants and saline nasal sprays or drops to relieve a blocked nose. Nasal decongestants should not be used for more than 4 or 5 days in a row.

Ephedrine, pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine are vaso-constrictor decongestants (like adrenaline) and should be avoided because they can raise blood pressure, but **oxymetazoline is perfectly safe with MAOIs**. **Pseudoephedrine** can rarely elevate blood pressure to potentially risky levels by itself, and this is somewhat potentiated by MAOIs. **phenylpropanolamine**

Combination ‘cough and cold’ medicines

These are often sold (and are generally rather pricier, franchise pharmacies love them!) and are used for symptom relief. It is important to know there is not good evidence showing they work. They often contain a mixture of ingredients often old drugs not otherwise seen or used in medicine, for instance, diphenhydramine (an anti-histamine), **dextromethorphan and chlorpheniramine**.

Dextromethorphan is an opioid analgesic with serotonin reuptake inhibitor properties which makes it potentially dangerous with MAOIs.

Chlorpheniramine (aka chlorphenamine)

Neither of these drugs is are likely to be dangerous if only one dose is taken, but repeated high doses, or small ‘over-doses’ could cause a serious reaction.

Antiviral medications

All are safe with MAOIs.

If you are likely to suffer complications from the flu, your doctor may prescribe antiviral medication.

Antibiotics

All are safe with MAOIs

Alcohol

In this context the safe and sensible use of alcohol is what would ensure that you are legally fit to drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery.

As explained in the separate diet guide concerning tyramine, there is little or no issue with tyramine in alcoholic beverages, except occasional live or open-fermented beers which when drunk on an empty stomach can sometimes have enough tyramine to provoke a reaction, although this is unlikely to be serious with ingestion as defined above.

However, many drugs that affect the central nervous system, and this includes anti-epileptic drugs, opioid painkillers like codeine, and sedative and anxiolytic drugs, including all benzodiazepines can magnify each other's effects and lead to impaired alertness, incoordination, memory impairment, and disinhibition (disinhibition can cause people to get irritable, angry, and lose their temper easily, which can lead to violence). Such effects can be substantially more pronounced in those who are sleep-deprived or over-tired.

However, MAOIs do not have these effects and there is no evidence of any multiplication of these effects from alcohol.

Appendix

Some brand names of preparations containing Oxymetazoline

4-Way Long Lasting

Afrin

Duramist Plus

Duration

Genasal

Mucinex Full Force

Mucinex Moisture Smart

Nasacon

Nasin

Neo-Synephrine 12 Hour

Nostrilla

NRS-Nasal Relief

Sinarest Nasal

Vicks Sinex 12 Hour

*Brand names of medicines that contain **dextromethorphan***

Strepsils Dry Cough

Vicks Cough

Benadryl for the Family Day and Night

Tussinol for Dry Coughs

Benadryl for the Family Dry Forte

Vicks Cough Syrup

Vicks Formula 44 for Dry Coughs

Robitussin Dry Cough Forte

Bisolvon Dry
Bisolvon Dry Kids

Brand names of combination products

Actifed® Cold and Allergy (containing **Chlorpheniramine** Maleate and **Phenylephrine** Hydrochloride)

Actifed® Cold and Sinus (containing **Chlorpheniramine** Maleate, **Pseudoephedrine** Hydrochloride, and Acetaminophen)

First-generation antihistamines are associated with a variety of adverse effects because of their ability to interfere with CNS histamine receptors. These agents may cause drowsiness, sedation, somnolence, and fatigue; they should be used with caution in patients who require mental alertness. They may also potentially impair cognitive function, memory, and psychomotor performance.^{17,21} In addition, first-generation antihistamines are associated with undesired anticholinergic effects including dry eye, urinary retention, constipation, and mydriasis.¹⁷ Antihistamines should be not be used in patients with narrow-angle glaucoma or BPH.²¹

What cold medicines have antihistamines?

Only the antihistamines in bold and red below are risky and these should be avoided when on MAOIs.

brompheniramine, chlorpheniramine, dexbrompheniramine, pheniramine diphenhydramine, phenyltoloxamine, pyrilamine, and triprolidine, oxylamine (e.g. brand names: Vicks NyQuil, Tylenol Cold and Cough Nighttime)

USA & Canadian Brand Names

Alka-Seltzer Plus Cold and Sinus

Genapap Sinus

Infants Tylenol Plus Cold

Mapap Sinus PE

Sinutab Sinus

Sudafed PE Sinus Headache

Allergy Sinus Medication Extra Strength

Childrens Tylenol Cold Bubble Gum Flavor

Childrens Tylenol Cold Cherry Flavor

Childrens Tylenol Cold Fruit Flavor

Colds And Flu With Vitamin C Extra Strength

Colds And Flu With Vitamin C Regular Strength

Counteract Childrens Cold Multi-Symptom Plus Cough

Extra Strength Tylenol Allergy Sinus Multi-Symptom Relief

Extra Strength Tylenol Sinus with Coolburst – Nighttime

Phenylpropanolamine is/was in these brands:

A.R.M. Allergy Relief

Acutrim 16 Hour

Acutrim Late Day

Acutuss DM Pediatric

Alka-Seltzer Plus Cold Medicine

Alka-Seltzer Plus Night Time

Alka-Seltzer Plus Night Time Effervescent

Allerest 12 Hour

And see [RxWiki](#)

The FDA removed it from OTC sales in 2005 because of its association with increased risk of hemorrhagic stroke. I am somewhat surprised that they ever approved it in the first place. However, it may be on sale in other countries.