

Safe for Children When Taken as Directed, No Link to Autism

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The Claim in Context

Acetaminophen, also known as paracetamol and sold under the brand name Tylenol and other brand names, is an over-the-counter (OTC) [medicine used to reduce fevers and relieve pain](#). Decades of research have found that acetaminophen is safe for children when [administered as recommended](#). Misleading claims that the medicine is not safe and is linked to increased rates of autism send a confusing, dangerous message to parents and expectant parents and does a disservice to autistic individuals.

Key Facts

- Acetaminophen is a common medication used to treat mild-to-moderate pain and reduce [fevers](#) by changing the way the body senses pain and by cooling the body.
- Studies do not point to a causal link between the use of acetaminophen and autism in children or in pregnancy, and [extensive research](#) indicates there is no single root cause of autism.
- Parents and caregivers should talk with their child's pediatrician if they have questions or concerns about what medications are appropriate for their children.
- The medication is available over the counter and is safe for children when [taken, or dosed, correctly](#) and under the guidance of a child's pediatrician. Children younger than 12 weeks of age should not be given acetaminophen unless instructed by their pediatrician.
- For children older than 6 months [experiencing a fever](#), treatment with medications like acetaminophen may not be necessary unless they are uncomfortable or having difficulty drinking water or staying hydrated.

- Typically, [acetaminophen](#) can be given every 4 to 6 hours as needed for fever or pain, but children should not be given more than 4 doses in 24 hours, and it should not be used with any other medicine containing acetaminophen. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has called for a reduction in availability of medications that combine acetaminophen with other agents.

Evidence Snapshot

[Research](#) does not show a causal link between acetaminophen use in children and autism. Similarly, [studies have found no significant or confirmed associations](#) between use of acetaminophen during pregnancy and children's risk of autism, ADHD, or intellectual disability. In 2011, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended that liquid, chewable, and tablet forms of acetaminophen should be made in one strength to reduce the risk of complication. Since then, manufacturers have taken steps to [standardize the concentration](#) of acetaminophen in pediatric medicines.

Why It Matters

Autistic children are valued members of our communities and deserve high-quality research that helps health care and other systems address genuine needs. There is [no single, root cause of autism](#). Research so far has pointed to multiple influences, much of it genetic, and also environmental factors. Elevating false claims and misleading information can lead parents and caregivers to avoid using certain medications that could otherwise help their children out of fear. The AAP supports the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' \(ACOG\) studies and research](#) concluding that the occasional use of acetaminophen as directed for fever and pain relief during pregnancy is safe. As always, patients should talk with their OB about medications in pregnancy, including pain relief.

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Experts Say:

"When their children are sick, parents and caregivers want to do everything they can to make their child feel better. In some cases, giving children medicine like acetaminophen may help them feel more comfortable. Like with all medications, however, it's important to follow dosing directions carefully and under the guidance of a pediatrician. There are times when medications may not be necessary, so parents should always talk with their child's pediatrician if they have questions or concerns. Pediatricians have children's best interests in mind and can help parents and caregivers consider risks and benefits and make the choice that's right for their child."

— J. Routt Reigart, MD, FAAP, Chair, Committee on Drugs, American Academy of Pediatrics

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Resources for Further Information

Autism Spectrum Disorder in Children

HealthyChildren.org

Acetaminophen Dosing tables for Fever and Pain in Children

HealthyChildren.org

Fever and Your Baby

HealthyChildren.org

Infant Fever

AAP Patient Care

Pediatrics: Fever and Antipyretic Use in Children

AAP Clinical Guidance

Acetaminophen Use During Pregnancy and Children's Risk of Autism, ADHD, and Intellectual Disability

JAMA

Acetaminophen Use During Pregnancy and Children's Risk of Autism, ADHD, and Intellectual Disability

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