



Cold Medications and Drowsiness



Cold and flu season is here again. Now is a good time for our annual warning about using over-the-counter cold and flu medications during work hours. Sometimes, cold remedies and work are not a good mix.

The most common side effect of over-the-counter cold and flu medicine is drowsiness, which lowers one's alertness and reaction time. 10% to 25% of people taking these medications report daytime drowsiness. This can be more than just an annoyance. Approximately 200,000 vehicle accidents are attributed to sleepiness every year. Fatigue is a factor in nearly one-third of truck accidents where the driver is killed. Taking medications, then coming to work and using machinery or sharp tools, can be dangerous. So, when you are ill, what should you do?

In many cases, your supervisor may not want you to show up for work when you have a bad cold or the flu. Not only does your risk of injury increase if medication causes you to be drowsy, but your productivity is likely to be poor as well. In addition, you may pass a virus to co-workers so that they too become ill. Finally, your own recovery may be delayed if you are not getting enough rest to fight the ailment. But, sometimes you must come to work and you need to take medications. If this is the case, remember the following:

Let your supervisor know. It may be possible to change your work assignments or temporarily arrange for less hazardous work. You probably shouldn't do tasks that require the use of a respirator, or that are highly demanding, physically. Another reason for speaking to your supervisor is to acknowledge that your performance may not be quite up to par for a few days. Also, should you be injured, your supervisor and emergency responders will need to know what medications you are taking if you are unable to recall.

Follow the recommended dosages. Exceeding the recommended dose will not help you get well faster or feel any better. In fact, what usually happens is that side effects, such as drowsiness, become more pronounced.

Do not mix medications. Remember, these pills, capsules, or tonics are chemicals. They may be incompatible when mixed, causing more harm than good. A mixture of medicines, or medicine mixed with alcohol, may intensify a side effect or even be dangerous.

Read the label. This is where you will find the information you need about dosage and side effects. If you can't read or don't fully understand the label, ask or phone the pharmacist.

Don't try new remedies during work hours. If you feel like experimenting with something new or different, do it over the weekend. Everyone reacts differently to cold and flu medication. Find one that works best and gives you the least troublesome side effects, and stay with it.

Wash your hands often. We give this advice to kids, but everyone should remember it during cold and flu season. More cold viruses are transmitted from hand to hand, doorknob to hand, and hand to mouth than in any other way. The best cold and flu solution is prevention!