



Diphenhydramine

Diphenhydramine is an antihistamine commonly found in over-the-counter products as an anti-tussive, a nighttime sleep aid, or to relieve allergy symptoms. It is also used for chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, drug-induced extrapyramidal reactions, motion sickness, anaphylaxis and urticaria. In 2002, the Maryland Poison Center was consulted on over 500 exposures to diphenhydramine products in children and adults. Overdoses occur as a result of unintentional ingestions by small children, intentional overdoses by teens and adults, and abuse by teens and young adults.

Serious symptoms in adults may be seen with ingestions of greater than 1 gram. Children are more sensitive to the toxic effects with seizures having been reported with doses of as little as 150 mg to 200 mg. Fatalities in children have been reported with less than 500 mg. The fatal dose in adults is estimated to be 20-40 mg/kg.

The most common clinical effects seen with large doses of diphenhydramine are a result of its anticholinergic properties. Neurological symptoms predominate and may progress from agitation, drowsiness and confusion to hallucinations, seizures and coma. Other anticholinergic symptoms that patients will present with include dry and warm skin, flushing, tachycardia, hypertension, hyperthermia, dilated pupils and urinary retention. Massive ingestions of diphenhydramine have been associated with a widening of the QRS interval due to sodium channel blocking properties, similar to what is seen in tricyclic antidepressant overdoses.

Initial treatment of diphenhydramine overdoses consists of gastrointestinal decontamination with activated charcoal. Although absorption of diphenhydramine is usually rapid (within one hour), activated charcoal may be of benefit even several hours after ingestion because of decreased GI motility. Sodium bicarbonate has been effective in treating the cardiac conduction abnormalities. Benzodiazepines are used to treat anticholinergic delirium and seizures. For additional information on the treatment of diphenhydramine overdoses, call the Maryland Poison Center—**1-800-222-1222**.

DID YOU KNOW THAT..... The FDA recently authorized the first 2003 shipment of CroFab™ ?

CroFab™ (Crotalidae Polyvalent Immune Fab-Ovine, distributed by Fougera®) is indicated for the management of patients with minimal or moderate North American crotalid snake envenomation. A shortage of CroFab™ in 2002 resulted in inadequate supplies at many Maryland hospitals. This shipment will be used to fill backorders first. Call the Maryland Poison Center for more information on CroFab™ and the management of snakebites.

