

Antihistamines - What You Need to Know

What — Antihistamines are a specific class of drugs that are used to treat or prevent several different allergy symptoms such as itchy, runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes, coughing, etc. Antihistamines are divided according to the generation in which they were developed and which histamine receptor they inhibit. Some antihistamines treat nausea, vomiting, and symptoms of dizziness as well.

Why — The CDC states that antihistamines can be used for allergies, asthma, nausea/vomiting, and indigestion. Several antihistamines are available for use OTC, but it is important to pay attention to age restrictions, side-effects, and precautions for antihistamine use.

Treatment Options

Allergies – Inhibits Histamine-1 receptors

Generation	Brand	Generic
1st Generation	Benadryl	Diphenhydramine
1st Generation	Dimetapp	Brompheniramine
2nd Generation	Allegra	Fexofenadine
2nd Generation	Zyrtec	Cetirizine
2nd Generation	Claritin	Loratadine

Nausea/Vomiting – Inhibits Histamine-1 receptors

Generation	Brand	Generic
1st Generation	Dramamine	Dimenhydrinate
1st Generation	Antivert	Meclizine

Indigestion – Inhibits Histamine-2 receptors

Generation	Brand	Generic
1st Generation	Tagamet	Cimetidine
1st Generation	Pepcid	Famotidine

Considerations

- 1st generation antihistamines are associated with side effects such as sedation, drowsiness, fatigue, and concentration impairment.
- 2nd generation antihistamines are less likely to cause side effects such as sedation and drowsiness and are more effective.
- Histamine-2 receptor blockers are most effective when taken twice daily on an empty stomach.

1. Church MK, Church DS. Pharmacology of antihistamines. Indian J Dermatol. 2013;58(3):219-224. doi:10.4103/0019-5154.110832

2. Key findings: Antihistamines and birth defects. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/meds/treatingfortwo/features/antihistamines-and-bd.html>. Published July 16, 2020. Accessed November 22, 2021.