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DTC ➡

NEWER ANTIHISTAMINES

With the coming of spring, direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertisements in newspapers, in magazines and on television are urging people with seasonal allergies to ask their doctors about one or another of the newer, non-sedating antihistamines.

SECOND-GENERATION ORAL H₁-RECEPTOR BLOCKERS

Drug	Formulation	Adult Dosage	Pediatric Dosage	Cost*
Cetirizine – Zyrtec	tablets: 5 mg, 10 mg syrup: 5 mg/5 mL	5 or 10 mg once/day	6-11 years: 5 or 10 mg once/day 2-5 years: 2.5 or 5 mg once/day or 2.5 mg bid	\$56.40
Fexofenadine – Allegra	tablets: 30 mg, 60 mg, 180 mg capsules: 60 mg	60 mg bid or 180 mg once/day	6-11 years: 30 mg bid	60.00
Loratadine – Claritin	tablets: 10 mg syrup: 5 mg/5 mL	10 mg once/day	6-11 years: 10 mg once/day 2-5 years: 5 mg once/day	68.10
Claritin Reditabs	tablets: 10 mg	10 mg once/day	6-11 years: 10 mg once/day	78.90

* Average cost to the patient for 30 days' treatment with the lowest recommended dosage for adults based on data from retail pharmacies nationwide provided by Scott-Levin's Source™ Prescription Audit (SPA), April 2000 to March 2001.

FIRST VS SECOND GENERATION — First-generation H₁-receptor blockers such as diphenhydramine (*Benadryl*, and others) or chlorpheniramine (*Chlor-Trimeton*, and others) are inexpensive, but in usual doses cause somnolence, impair psychomotor performance, and can interfere with learning and decrease work productivity. The patient may be unaware of these effects, which may persist in the morning after taking the drug at bedtime and may continue to occur after long-term use (FER Simons, *Clin Exp Allergy* 1999; 29 suppl 3:125). Second-generation drugs penetrate poorly into the brain and are much less likely to have adverse effects on the central nervous system.

SECOND-GENERATION DRUGS — In recommended doses loratadine is non-sedating, but with higher doses sedation can occur. Cetirizine is sedating in some patients even in recommended doses. Fexofenadine has been free of sedative effects even in higher-than-recommended doses (Z Shamsi and I Hindmarch, *Hum Psychopharmacol Clin Exp* 2000; 15 suppl 1:S3). Although the results of clinical studies are conflicting, cetirizine and fexofenadine appear to be more effective than loratadine (PH Howarth et al, *J Allergy Clin Immunol* 1999; 104:927; P Van Cauwenberge et al, *Clin Exp Allergy* 2000; 30:891; GM Walsh et al, *Drugs* 2001, 61:207).

CONCLUSION — First-generation H₁-receptor blockers can impair psychomotor performance, often without sedation or other noticeable symptoms. Among second-generation H₁ blockers, fexofenadine may offer the best combination of effectiveness and safety.

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