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On Drugs and Therapeutics

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IN BRIEF

Cetirizine OTC

Cetirizine (*Zyrtec*, and others) and cetirizine/pseudoephedrine (*Zyrtec-D*) are becoming available without a prescription this month for treatment of allergic rhinitis and urticaria in adults and children. Cetirizine is the second of the second-generation H1-antihistamines to become available over the counter. Loratadine (*Claritin*, and others) was the first.

Cetirizine has been shown to be more effective than loratadine in suppressing histamine-induced wheals in healthy volunteers ([W Carey et al. *Drugs Exp Clin Res* 2002; 28:243](#)), but no well-controlled clinical trials have established that any second-generation H1-antihistamine is more effective overall than any other ([M Plaut and MD Valentine. *N Engl J Med* 2005; 353:1934](#)).

Cetirizine may be mildly sedating in some patients, but it is significantly less sedating than first-generation H1-antihistamines such as diphenhydramine (*Benadryl*, and others) or chlorpheniramine (*Chlor-Trimeton*, and others), which have been available without a prescription for many years. Its safety in young children is better documented than that of any other first- or second-generation H1-antihistamine ([Treat Guidel *Med Lett* 2007; 5:71](#)).

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