



Drug Interactions Can be Dangerous

Patients must take responsibility for talking to their pharmacists and doctors about all of the medications they are taking—including over-the-counter (OTC) medications—to ensure they are taking them properly, and that any adverse drug interactions are avoided.

Any time you take two or more drugs, consume alcohol while taking medication, or even eat certain foods while taking medication, a negative interaction can occur and produce dangerous results. Even OTC drugs such as aspirin or cold medication can have an adverse effect when combined with other medications.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), drug interactions fall into three main categories:

Drug-drug Interactions – Occur when two or more drugs react with each other. The interaction of multiple drugs may cause you to experience unexpected side effects. For example, mixing a drug designed to help you sleep (a sedative) combined with a drug to help alleviate allergy symptoms (an antihistamine) can slow your reactions and make driving a car or operating machinery dangerous. Be aware of these common drug-drug interactions:

- ✓ Antacids reduce the absorption rate for blood-thinning drugs. Aspirin, on the other hand, will increase the effects of such drugs.



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Medication Instructions: Don't Take Them Lightly

Prescriptions and over-the-counter medications can treat and cure many kinds of health problems, from minor infections to major, life-threatening diseases. They can also cause serious and even fatal complications if you do not take them properly.

Studies show that more than one-half of prescription medications are taken incorrectly. Common mistakes include:

- Taking the drug more frequently than directed
- Taking the drug past its expiration date
- Getting too many refills from more than one doctor
- Taking them with other medicines, in a possibly dangerous combination
- Using someone else's prescription

To help avoid negative complications from mistakes or drug interactions, remember the following guidelines:

- Always give your doctor complete information about your symptoms.

- Always tell your doctor about any other drugs you are taking, including any OTC medications.



- Pay close attention to your doctor's instructions when he is prescribing a new medication; ask him to repeat the instructions if you are unsure of something.
- Always read the package insert before using any OTC medication.
- If you are concerned about potential risks or side effects, ask your doctor and/or pharmacist.
- Report any unexpected side effects of a medication to your physician. ◇

What You Need to Know About New Medications

When your doctor prescribes a new medication for you, there are many things you should know about the drug itself as well as how to take it properly. To be sure you get all of the right information by asking your doctor or pharmacist the following questions:

- What is the name of the drug?
- Can a generic equivalent be substituted? (It may save you money on your co-pay and be equally as effective.)
- What is the purpose of the drug?
- When and how should I take the drug?
- Are there any potential side effects?
- Are there any specific over-the-counter or prescription drugs I should avoid using while on this medication?

Other items you should discuss include:

- Allergies you have to food or medicine
- Other prescription or nonprescription medicines you are taking



- Your medical history, including conditions such as diabetes, asthma or depression
- If you are pregnant or breast-feeding
- Your use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco
- Any vitamins, supplements or diets you are on ♦

How to Read a Drug Label

When you have a prescription filled at your pharmacy, the label will generally include the drug name; dosage information; the type of medication (such as pills, liquid or capsules); the strength of the medication, usually shown in milligrams (mg); and the number of refills available.

To help consumers make informed decisions about nonprescription medications—or OTC medications—the U.S. Food and Drug Administration requires standard labels on nonprescription drugs. It is very important to read this label every time you use an OTC drug, since you are taking it without instructions from a health care professional. Labels on OTC medications contain drug ingredients, drug uses, warnings, instructions for their use, and information about potential negative interactions with certain foods or other drugs. ♦



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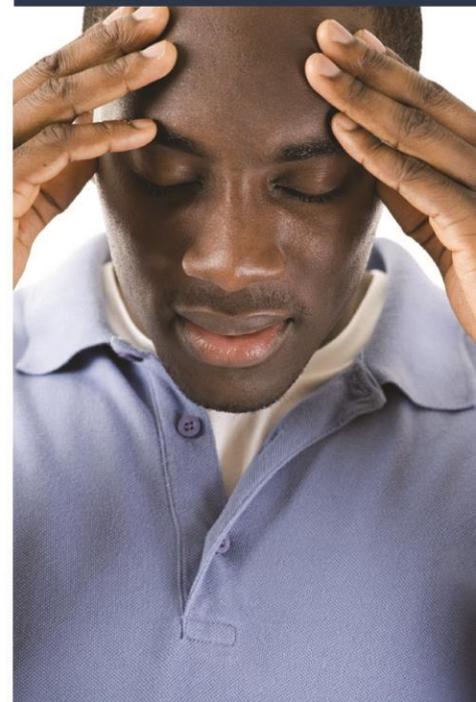
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- ✓ Antihistamines, used to treat colds and allergies, can increase the effect of tranquilizers and some painkillers.
- ✓ Some antibiotics—such as penicillin, amoxicillin and tetracycline—may lessen the effectiveness of low-dose oral contraceptives by reducing the amount of hormones absorbed by the body.
- ✓ For people with insulin-dependent diabetes, the use of beta-blockers (a class of heart medication) or MAO inhibitors (a class of antidepressants) can magnify the effect of insulin.

Drug-food/beverage Interactions – Result from drugs reacting with certain foods or beverages. For example, mixing alcohol with some drugs may slow your reactions, cause you to feel tired or even put you at serious risk for other complications.

Drug-condition Interactions – May occur when an existing medical condition makes certain drugs potentially harmful. For example, nasal decongestants may produce an unwanted reaction in someone with high blood pressure.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about potential interactions of the drugs you are taking. For more information, visit the FDA's site at www.fda.gov.



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