

When Medications Interact

What are Drug Interactions?

Ideally medications should only do what you want them to do. However, food, other medications, and dietary supplements can change the way your medicine normally works. When this happens, it is called a “drug interaction.” You should understand drug interactions in order to keep yourself healthy and safe while taking medications.

Drug interactions can dramatically change a medication’s effect, and these effects are not always predictable. Some of the effects of drug interactions are shown in the box. Importantly, drug interactions might result in a need for longer treatment and increased costs.

Effects of Drug Interactions

- Increased effect, possibly leading to toxicity
- Less or no effect from one or more interacting drugs
- Possible greater frequency or severity of adverse effects
- Decreased cure rate or delayed benefit

What types of products can interact with drugs?

Interactions between two or more medications, or “drug-drug” interactions, can occur between many types of medications (Rx or OTC). They could result in:

- More or less of a medication being absorbed into your bloodstream
- A medication staying in your body longer than normal, possibly resulting in a toxic effect

Dietary and herbal supplements can also alter the effects and safety of certain medications. Read the labels of dietary and herbal supplements and write down the ingredients in the product. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice before you start taking any new dietary or herbal supplement to help avoid possible interactions.

Foods and beverages might interact with some medications or supplements. Certain medications are best taken with food to help your body better absorb them. However, the absorption of others might be reduced when taken with food and these medications would need to be taken on an empty stomach. Some medications might interact with one type of food or beverage but not with others. Talk to your pharmacist about whether to take your medications with food or on an empty stomach and whether you should avoid any beverages (e.g., alcohol, milk).

How can I prevent a drug interaction?

How to Avoid Interactions

- Keep a list of your current medications and dietary or herbal supplements
- Avoid using multiple pharmacies for your medications
- Always ask your pharmacist or doctor before starting or stopping a medication or supplement
- Notify your health care provider immediately if you think you may have experienced an adverse effect

A summary of how to help avoid interactions is shown in the box to the left. Keep an up-to-date list of your medications and dietary or herbal supplements handy. Use this list to inform your health care providers about all of the medications you currently take. Try to use only one pharmacy to keep your prescription records in one place. If you go to more than one pharmacy to help save costs, use a service like JustAskBlue.com to have your medications reviewed by a pharmacist. Ask your pharmacist how and when you should take each of your medications. Before you start a new medication or stop one you are already taking, always consult your doctor or pharmacist to make sure it is safe to do so. If you have a side effect when starting or stopping a new medication or supplement, talk to your health care provider right away to make sure you are not at risk for a harmful drug interaction.

How can I find more information about drug interactions?

To learn more, talk with your health care provider or visit Justaskblue.com – You ask and we answer!

References:

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