



PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH DRUG/HERB INTERACTIONS

Ask Your Pharmacist

Millions of American adults currently use vitamins and plant-based supplements, in addition to their daily dose of prescribed medications. Yet despite the popularity of herbal and nutritional supplements to promote better health, not everyone who uses them is well informed about all of their properties or how they may interfere with a variety of prescription drugs and other medications.

An alarming statistic shows that 38% of our population is taking natural medicines without telling their doctors or pharmacists. The good news is that doctors and pharmacists are becoming experts in these remedies, but the frightening fact that patients are not telling their doctors about alternatives throws red flags to the entire healthcare industry.

Many patients fail to share information about their use of herbal and nutritional supplements with their healthcare professionals. At the same time, healthcare professionals often don't think to ask if patients are taking herbal nutritional supplements, so both of these oversights could have dangerous consequences.

A recent study from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, published in this month's issue of *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, shows that the adverse effects of using prescription drugs and natural health products (NHP) simultaneously are being under-reported. Consequently the potential risks may be underestimated by health-care professionals and the public.

A literature review and survey of 132 pharmacists in Canada revealed that while 47% reported that they had encountered a patient with a suspected adverse event, only 1.5% reported this to Health Canada, the country's federal health department. In contrast, 19% of the pharmacists had reported adverse reactions to prescription or non-prescription drugs.

Herbs have long been considered the medicine of the planet, and in many cultures herbs remain the primary source of medicine. What worries our healthcare professionals is the use of herbs without understanding both their potential dangers and benefits.

According to a study at Yale School of Medicine, Black Cohosh, a plant commonly used by breast

cancer patients to alleviate the menopause-like side effects of therapy, may alter the effects of anti-cancer drugs. According to lead researcher Sara Rockwell, professor of Therapeutic Radiology and Pharmacology, combining mainstream therapies with complementary and alternative medicine is common practice among cancer patients, but because many do not tell their physician, they are not alerted to possible interactions with drugs.

Doctors and pharmacists are doing their best to understand the implications of using both forms of therapy. When a prescription is filled, the information about an herb is usually not known or addressed. With current sales of herbs in the tens of billions, it has become all the more necessary that we understand these interactions.

It is known that some herbs will lessen or negate the effects of a medication. The same holds true for medicines that will affect herb use. For instance, an aspirin will negate the effect of Feverfew, an herbal approach to headaches.

Some prescription medications can interact with natural products and result in undesirable effects. It is also possible for some prescription medications to cause the body to displace important nutrients and specific supplements may be recommended. Clinical research has revealed that many drugs contribute to the depletion of vitamins, minerals, enzymes, and gastrointestinal flora. These nutritional deficiencies may in turn interfere with all metabolic activity including immune function, digestion, DNA replication, glucose metabolism, cardiac function, neurological function, tissue repair, and wound healing.

As you may know, there is more and more information becoming available regarding natural products and how they should be used appropriately. Our research indicates that some supplements and herbs can be very useful and may produce significant improvement in overall health. However, it should not be assumed that it is safe or appropriate to use these products casually. Some prescription medications can interact with natural products and result in undesirable effects. It is also possible for some prescription medications to cause the body to displace important nutrients and specific supplements may be recommended.

In the pharmacy industry, there are new information

for your best health

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about drug/herb interactions and your health.**

DRUG/HERB INTERACTIONS (continued)

services that are helping to educate us about these potential problems. Our pharmacists have studied the current knowledge on this subject and can help you make sound choices for your healthcare, as well as inform your physician about herbs that may be a problem.

As your pharmacists, we are in the best position to discuss these important issues with you and we take our responsibility to do so very seriously. We would welcome the opportunity to review your total health care needs, including nutritional supplements and herbs, to determine what is truly right for you. Stop by our pharmacy today, and bring all your medicines and natural products. We will gladly check them for you, and make sure you are treating yourself well.

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SOME INTERACTIONS

ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES may cause your body to lose valuable vitamins and minerals.

Taking ANTIBIOTICS can cause the depletion of important intestinal bacterial flora.

ARTHRITIS MEDICATIONS can cause a loss of important nutrients.

DIABETIC MEDICATIONS can rob the body of important nutrients.

Research indicates that the use of oral contraceptives may cause your body to lose important nutrients including Vitamin B-2, Vitamin B-6, Vitamin B-12 and Folic Acid. The sub clinical levels of these vitamins and minerals may lead to headaches, dizziness, vision impairment, anemia, fatigue and increased homocysteine levels.

Taking Antibiotics can cause the depletion of important intestinal bacterial flora.

Good bacteria, known as intestinal flora, help us process nutrients from our food and support our immune system. Bad bacteria enter our body and can cause infections and other problems. Antibiotics are designed to kill bacteria, but they cannot distinguish between those that are helpful and those that are harmful. Research shows that the absence of good bacteria can cause problems with digestion, absorption of nutrients and disorders such as yeast infections. Probiotic formula supplements with acidophilus and bifidus can replenish the good bacteria, promote the proper intake of vitamins and minerals, and support the body's immune system.

Arthritis Medications can cause a loss of important nutrients.

NSAID drug therapy (including aspirin) can cause urinary excretion of vitamin C. This vitamin is essential for maintaining connective tissue and synthesizing collagen.

Corticosteroids can reduce dietary calcium vital for nerve, muscle, and bone function. Low levels of calcium may cause aching joints, muscle cramps; in addition to extremity numbness and the deficiency is common in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) sufferers.

Low serum levels of zinc are common in people taking corticosteroid medication and in those suffering from RA. This key mineral is a constituent in the enzyme synthesis of collagen.

Diabetic Medications can rob the body of important nutrients.

Chromium is essential in the body's metabolism of glucose. Research indicates that people with high insulin levels are likely to have low chromium levels. When diabetics supplement chromium, both sugar and insulin levels decrease.

Studies have demonstrated a relationship between magnesium deficiency and insulin resistance. Low dietary intake of magnesium may produce irritability and nervousness.

Studies have shown that B-6 supplementation may help repair eye problems associated with diabetes. Low levels of B-6 can create headaches, dizziness, numbness, and irritability.