

Your Question Answered

Your pharmacist is the best source of information on how to get the most from your medicines. If you're taking more than one medicine regularly, here are some tips on how to better manage your medications and avoid food-drug interactions.

Q: I am very health conscious and take many kinds of vitamins, herbal and natural supplements, and healthy foods. I also often self-medicate with OTC medications. Should I avoid certain foods, beverages or supplements when I take my medications?

A: A common misconception is that over-the-counter (OTC) medications are safe for everyone because they can be purchased without a prescription and anything "natural" must be harmless. Both OTC medications and natural food or supplements can cause drug interactions when taken in wrong combinations, causing an adverse drug reaction (ADR) that may range from mild to severe and even death. Often, foods can have significant effects on the efficacy of the medications taken.



Grapefruit

When the body digests grapefruit, it uses the same liver "pathway" (metabolism) as many other medications. In effect, more of the drugs enter the bloodstream and making them more potent than they should be. Avoid drinking grapefruit juice or eating grapefruit within 4 hours of taking your medications.

Dairy Products

The calcium in dairy products such as yoghurt and cheese decreases the absorption and thus lessens the effectiveness of certain antibiotics, particularly tetracyclines. These foods should not be eaten within 2 hours of a "cycline" drug, so that the full dosage of the drug is available for treating the infection.

Garlic

Garlic may interfere with anticoagulants (such as warfarin) and anti-platelet medications; thus it is sometimes known as "natural blood thinner". This combination may increase the risk of bleeding. If you are going for elective surgery, stop using garlic 2 weeks prior to operation.

Ginkgo biloba

A substance in the ginkgo called Ginkgolide B may inhibit the platelet-activating factor in the blood. Combined with aspirin or other NSAIDs, which are also platelet aggregation inhibitors, it could increase the effects and cause easy bruising and bleeding.

Acidic Foods and Beverages

Acidic foods and beverages such as tea, coffee and citrus or vegetable juices can destroy penicillin and dissolve some drugs in the stomach before the drugs reach the intestine. This will decrease the amount of drugs entering the body.

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