



Review All Current Medications, Herbs and OTCs with Your Doctor

Upon discovering a new herb or over the counter medication (OTC), we often feel like we've found all of the answers to our medical problems. Yet most of us forget that adding natural herbs (and OTCs) to our daily pill regimens can seriously alter the way our prescription medicines affect our bodies.

Some non-prescription herbs or OTCs can actually "potentiate" or intensify the way our prescription drugs affect us. Others can actually nullify or cancel out the efficiency of our prescribed medications. It's even possible to worsen chronic health conditions like diabetes, depression and high blood pressure without it becoming obvious until after a serious or deadly health crisis.

Women on birth control pills are frequently shocked to learn that their unexpected pregnancies may have been partially caused by their unauthorized mixing of prescribed medications with other substances.

Drug Labeling Advice from FDA's Michael Levy

In December of 2010, Michael Levy, director of the Federal Drug Administration's (FDA's) Division of New Drugs and Labeling Compliance, offered the following advice to consumers about misleading drug labels. "Consumers should avoid products marketed as supplements that claim to have effects similar to prescription drugs." He then added, "Consumers should also be wary of products with labeling only in a foreign language or that are marketed through mass e-mails."

The Three Main Types of Drug Interactions

According to the [FDA](#), there are three main types of drug interactions:

- Those that occur when drugs are mixed with specific foods or beverages;
- Those that take place when one drug is mixed with one or more other prescribed drugs; and
- Those that occur when a drug is mixed with some type of “dietary supplement.”

All three of these situations can be avoided if consumers will fully discuss their drugs with their doctors and tell them, *in advance*, of any herbs or dietary supplements they’d like to add to their daily regimens.

Several Internet Resources for Researching RXs, OTCs and Herbs

Under the heading “Avoiding Drug Interactions,” the FDA’s Web site provides a search box for looking up dietary supplements and herbs. (Readers can visit [this link](#) for that purpose.) Other helpful information can also be found on WebMD’s partner site [Medicine.Net.com](#), the [FDA’s printable materials](#) Web page and the Mayo Clinic’s “[Drugs and Supplements](#)” Web page.

Ways to Protect Yourself from Serious Drug Interaction Problems

In addition to regularly talking with your prescribing physicians about all of the drugs and other supplements you’re currently taking, be sure to:

1. Carefully read all drug or “dietary supplement” labels;
2. Ask your doctors and pharmacist (try to obtain all of your drugs from the *same pharmacy* so prescription drug interactions can be more readily discovered) such questions as:
 - (a) Are there any foods or beverages I should avoid while taking this particular drug?
 - (b) Can exposure to the sun cause added problems for me while taking this prescription?
 - (c) Can I drive or operate heavy machinery while taking this new drug? *and*
 - (d) Should I take this new prescription with food or on an empty stomach?

Keep in mind that it's always wise to keep a dated list in your wallet of all of the medications (and other substances) that you take daily. You might even ask your doctor to periodically provide you with a signed letter documenting everything you're currently taking.

(Note: The information provided above should only be considered in conjunction with any warnings your doctors have given you about properly managing your medications and supplements.)

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