

Drug Interactions: Talk to Your Pharmacist

Medicines, whether conventional or natural have a great power to heal and improve the quality of life for millions of people. But they can also do harm if not taken correctly.

Drug interactions occur in thousands of Canadians every year. Such interactions and other drug “misadventures” cost the US health care system upwards of \$170 billion a year. Drug interactions can occur between prescription drugs, but also between prescription medications and herbal supplements, over-the-counter medications or even food.

Canadians fill an average of twelve prescriptions a year. Those under the age of thirty will only fill five prescriptions, but people in their 60’s and 70’s will fill twenty two. More than seventy-five percent of people over the age of 65 take more than one prescription medication daily and taking multiple medications increases the chance of a drug interaction.

Drug interactions are not limited to the elderly however. The pressures of our fast-paced lifestyle have forced many young people to use prescription medications such as antidepressants and sedatives to help them cope with the stressors of daily living. Drug interactions can lead to increased side-effects of the medication, but sadly in some cases can even cause death.

Establishing a relationship with your pharmacy and pharmacist is critical in preventing drug interactions. Be sure he or she has an up-to-date file on all your prescription medications. This will enable your pharmacist to ensure that any new prescriptions won’t interact with your current ones. Any allergies to medications can also be recorded.

Be up front with your pharmacist when asking for over-the-counter medications as well as vitamin supplements and herbal products. So often people think that because a supplement is natural it is safe, but this isn’t always the case. There are plenty of drug-supplement interactions, and as supplement use increases in North America, more and more harmful interactions are being discovered.

When you receive a new prescription, be sure to learn all you can about the medication from your pharmacist. Find out what the medication is for, how to take it (with or without food), when to take it (how many times a day), how long to take it for and if there are any side effects. Don’t forget to ask about drug-food interactions as well. There’s a long list of medications that shouldn’t be taken with grapefruit. Milk and dairy products also interact with a number of prescription medications, especially antibiotics.

Medications, whether they are prescription, over-the-counter products or vitamins or herbs should not be taken lightly. Pharmacists are key health care professionals in helping people to achieve the best results from their medications. Choose a pharmacist that you trust and build a partnership for good health.