

Preventing Drug Interactions

Combining medications with certain herbs or foods increases the potential for dangerous drug interactions. To help you avoid these interactions, Susan Kundrat, MS, RD, owner of Nutrition on the Move in Champaign, Illinois, provides these guidelines. This material is for general education only; work with a doctor to understand specific interactions.

1 Anti-Inflammatory Drugs. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) and naproxen (Anaprox, Aleve or Naprosyn) should be taken with food or milk to decrease potential stomach irritation. Also, since chronic alcohol use can increase the risk of liver damage or stomach bleeding, abstain or limit alcohol consumption when taking these medications.

2 Aspirin. Don't take aspirin with alcohol as it can lead to stomach irritation. Also, even a few alcoholic drinks can raise blood alcohol levels higher than normal if aspirin is consumed one hour before drinking. Because aspirin serves as a blood thinner, taking it with more than 400 international units of vitamin E or the herb ginkgo biloba can increase the risk of excessive bleeding. Check with your doctor to see if taking buffered or enteric-coated aspirin would reduce that risk.

3 Blood Pressure Medications. When taking ACE inhibitors (e.g., Zestril, Vasotec, Accupril, Lotensin or Prinivil), limit intake of foods high in potassium, such as bananas, orange juice and milk, because ACE inhibitors already cause the body to retain potassium. Digitalis (Lanoxin), on the other hand, can *deplete* potassium stores, so it's important to add potassium-rich

foods to your diet and avoid high-fiber foods, which can interfere with the absorption of digitalis. In addition, do not take calcium channel blockers (e.g., Norvasc, Cardizem, Procardia or Adalat) with grapefruit or grapefruit juice, as grapefruit can inhibit enzymes in the intestine that help with drug absorption, increasing blood levels of the medication.

4 Antidepressants. If you take paroxetine (Paxil), sertraline (Zoloft) or fluoxetine (Prozac), avoid alcohol, which can increase drowsiness and dizziness and worsen depression symptoms. In addition, avoid the herb St. John's wort; combining herbal and prescription medications for depression can lead to adverse side effects, such as agitation or dizziness.

5 MAO Inhibitors. If you are taking the antidepressants phenelzine (Nardil) or Tranylcypromine (Parnate), be cautious about drug-food interactions. If you consume foods containing the amino acid tyramine while taking these MAO inhibitors, a potentially *fatal* increase in blood pressure can occur. Avoid foods such as yeast concentrates, smoked fish, aged cheeses, bananas, avocados, soy sauce and processed meats. Some alcoholic beverages also contain tyramine. Ask your doctor which products to avoid when taking a specific MAO inhibitor.

6 Antihistamines. Avoid taking antihistamines (e.g., Dimetane, Benadryl, Allegra and Claritin) with grapefruit or grapefruit juice, as, again, grapefruit can affect drug absorption. Because some antihistamines can cause drowsiness and slow mental performance, they should not be mixed with alcohol.

7 Antibiotics. Don't take some antibiotics (e.g., penicillin and erythromycin) with acidic products,

such as citrus fruits or coffee, because the acid interferes with absorption. Quinolones (Cipro, Levaquin and Floxin) and tetracyclines (Achromycin, Sumycin or Vibramycin) can interact with dairy products, calcium and iron supplements, antacids and magnesium-containing laxatives; interaction results in decreased drug absorption.

8 Antacids. Taking Cimetidine (Tagamet), famotidine (Pepcid), Ranitidine (Zantac) and nizatidine (Axid) with alcohol or caffeine can irritate the stomach and make it more difficult for the stomach to heal. Aluminum-based antacids, such as Di-Gel, Maalox and Mylanta, can deplete calcium, so take adequate dietary calcium if you use them. Also, don't use aluminum-based antacids when consuming citrus fruits or juices because their acidity can cause a harmful increase in aluminum absorption. If you take antacids that are high in calcium (e.g., Tums), avoid ingesting them with fibrous foods, which decrease the drugs' absorption.

9 Additional Resource. For a comprehensive review of how specific herbs interact with various foods or medications, see www.herbmed.org.



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