

Avoiding Drug Interactions

The More You Take, The More You Need To Take Care

Who would think that eating right and taking your vitamins might be harmful to your health. Well, if you are also taking medications, even over-the-counter products, the interactions with foods, vitamins or supplements may change the way the medication works, and can even be life-threatening.

Today many people are likely to be seeing more than one doctor, taking several medications and trying herbal supplements or vitamins on their own. The chances of an interaction are pretty good. It's up to you to know exactly what you are taking and be very careful when you add something else into your regimen – even a vitamin.

It may be helpful to keep a list of everything you take as well as key foods that you eat. If you are a fan of licorice, avoid diuretics because you can lose too much potassium. Aged cheese and wine contain tyramine. Mix that ingredient with antidepressants and you can experience deadly blood pressure increases. Other foods can increase the effects of a medication or block absorption.

Write down the things you should avoid next to each drug or supplement and remember to share your list with all your medical professionals. Of course, make similar lists for everyone in the family. Make sure your kids know what kinds of foods or beverages may react badly with any medications or supplements they are taking. *Don't hesitate to talk to your pharmacist any time you fill or refill a prescription or reach for an o-t-c product.*

Read product labels and all the accompanying information. Answer these questions before you take that pill or capsule. Do you take the medication on an empty stomach? With food? With a glass of water? Should you avoid milk or milk products?

The FDA lists three main categories of drug interactions:

Drug-drug (Example: a sedative taken along with an antihistamine for allergies can slow reactions and make it dangerous to drive.)

Drug-food/beverage (Example: people taking the anti-

coagulant coumadin should limit Vitamin K foods such as broccoli, spinach, kale, turnip greens, cauliflower, and brussel sprouts, which produce blood-clotting substances.)

Drug-condition (Example: if you have high blood pressure, you may want to avoid nasal decongestants.)

People tend to forget that over-the-counter remedies are serious medications and should be treated as such. Even if you have used a product before, read the label very carefully. Labels can change as new information becomes known, and that once familiar product could react badly with other things you are taking.



Keep in mind that different o-t-c drugs may contain the same active ingredient which means you can end up ingesting too much of that particular ingredient if you take different products at the same time. Checking the ingredients and warnings on anything you use can also help you avoid allergic reactions. Some products that relieve joint pain should not be used by people who have shellfish allergies, as an example.

Here are a few additional tips for making sure your medications are safe and effective:

- ◆ Never mix pills or the ingredients in capsules with food without a doctor's okay.
- ◆ Take your medications with a full glass of water, unless your doctor has given you different instructions.
- ◆ Never take medications with alcohol or with a hot drink - the heat can affect the medication.
- ◆ Don't take your medications and vitamins or dietary supplements at the same time.
- ◆ Store medications in a cool, dry place, NOT in the bathroom where it is humid.
- ◆ Don't share medications with others and don't accept medications (even over-the-counter remedies) from anyone until you check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Where Has All The Quiet Gone? Rediscovering Solitude

"Calling noise a nuisance is like calling smog an inconvenience. Noise must be considered a hazard to the health of people everywhere."



Those are the words of a former U.S. Surgeon General, delivered almost 40 years ago at a conference on the health hazards

of noise. While Dr. William H. Stewart was referring primarily to the physical harm noise can cause, these days we might want to think about the mental or emotional costs of living in a world of constant sound and external stimulation.

Where *is* the quiet? When *are* we alone with our thoughts, or free to let the mind wander, create and ponder? There is a lot to be said for lying in the grass on a summer day, watching cloud formations – without an added soundtrack.

Alone doesn't mean lonely

Psychologists and therapists make the distinction between solitude or alone time and loneliness. Seeking quality time with your thoughts promotes creativity and problem-solving, allows the mind to rejuvenate, and actually enhances your ability to connect with other people. Loneliness on the other hand is isolation, which you can experience whether or not you are surrounded by people or tuned in to your electronic devices. We have become an alienated society despite, or maybe because of, all the new "communication" outlets available. We don't need to interact with others in the same way, and we can avoid self-reflection and quiet contemplation completely.



Give meditation a try

A few minutes of focused breathing and silent concentration each day can do wonders for physical *and* mental health. Take a break from outside stimulation.

Close your eyes. Relax the usual tension we carry in our neck and shoulders and just focus on the pattern of your breath.

Build quiet into your day

Think about ways to turn the volume down in daily activities. Try one of these:

- ◇ Start your day without the TV news; wake up to classical music or nature sounds. Do a few Yoga stretches and some deep breathing.
- ◇ Plan one meal where you will practice "mindful" eating - no other distractions or entertainment.
- ◇ Take a run or walk in silence; become aware of your heart beating and your breathing. Focus on the rhythm of your feet hitting the ground.

Visit a place of inspiration

Think of a place that makes you feel calm and renewed. Go there for a mental cleanse whenever you are feeling stressed or down. Maybe your special place is a local park or conservatory, a body of water, or your own backyard early in the morning.



Open your children's lives to the value of quiet

From everybody's favorite neighbor comes this advice: "Set aside 'quiet time' each day for you and your child -- even if that's only for a few minutes. Turn off the television or radio...read a book, look at magazines, draw pictures, or just sit and enjoy the peace and quiet." *

* from a Mister Rogers Neighborhood article, "Noisy Times and Quiet Times."

As holistic health pioneer Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen points out, "We all need time to hear ourselves."

