

## Protect Yourself from Harmful Drug Interactions

If you take several different medicines, see more than one doctor or have certain health conditions, you and your doctors need to be aware of all the medicines you take to avoid potential problems, such as drug interactions.

Drug interactions may make your medicine less effective, cause unexpected side effects or increase the action of a drug. Some interactions may even be harmful. Reading the label every time you use a nonprescription or prescription drug and learning about drug interactions may be vital to your health. You can reduce the risk of potentially harmful drug interactions or side effects with a little knowledge and common sense.

Drug interactions fall into three broad categories:

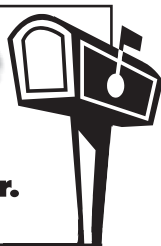
- 1. Drug-drug interactions**, which occur when two or more drugs react with each other. This may cause you to experience an unexpected side effect. For example, mixing a drug that helps you sleep (a sedative) with one for allergies (an antihistamine) can slow your reactions and make driving a car or operating machinery dangerous.
- 2. Drug-food/beverage interactions**, which result from drugs reacting with foods or beverages. For example, mixing alcohol with some drugs may cause you to feel tired or slow your reactions.
- 3. Drug-condition interactions**, which may occur when an existing medical condition makes certain drugs potentially harmful. For example, if you have high blood pressure, you could experience an unwanted

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reaction if you take a nasal decongestant.

Over-the-counter (OTC) drug labels contain information about ingredients, uses, warnings and directions that is important to read and understand. The label also includes important information about possible drug interactions. In addition, drug labels may change as new information becomes known. That's why it's especially important to read the label every time you use a drug. If you still have questions after reading the drug product label, ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

When your doctor prescribes a new drug, discuss all OTC and prescription drugs, dietary supplements, vitamins, botanicals, minerals and herbals you take, as well as the foods you eat. Ask your pharmacist for the package insert for each prescription drug you take. This insert provides more information about potential drug interactions.

Remember that different OTC drugs may contain the same active ingredient. If you are taking more than one OTC drug, pay attention to the active ingredients used in the products to avoid taking too much of a particular ingredient. Under certain circumstances — such as if you are pregnant or breast-feeding — you should talk to your doctor before you take any medicine. Also, make sure to know what ingredients are contained in the medicines you take to avoid possible allergic reactions.

For more information and a list of examples of drug interaction warnings you may see on certain OTC drug products, visit [http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic\\_text/health/drug-interactions/druginte3.htm](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/health/drug-interactions/druginte3.htm), or write: Federal Citizen Information Center, "Drug Interactions," Pueblo, CO 81009 to receive a free booklet.