



Medication and Food...It's Not that Simple

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We grew up when we cleaned our plate, drank milk with each meal and took all our medications after we ate...those were the good old days. It's not that simple anymore.

Nowadays, medications are more complex and the size and content of meals and when you eat them can determine how you respond to your medications. Some medications must be taken on an empty stomach because food slows their entry into the blood system or prevents absorption altogether. This particularly true of some antibiotics which should be taken on an empty stomach. This means one hour before or two hours after a meal.

Dairy products and supplements can greatly affect medications. For example, the calcium in milk, other dairy products or supplements bind tetracycline and Cipro (ciprofloxin), two commonly prescribed antibiotics, causing less of either of the antibiotics to be absorbed. To prevent this, these antibiotics should be taken at least two hours before and two hours after eating dairy products or taking calcium supplement.

And just because a medication can be purchased without a prescription doesn't mean that it's not affected by food. Many of today's non-prescription medications (OTCs or over-the-counters) were at one time prescription medications but usually at higher dosage strengths. Over-the-counter medications that you buy without a prescription, such as aspirin, low doses of Ibuprofen and naproxen should be taken with some food to prevent stomach problems that they warn you about in the ads seen on television. (The prescription strength of these medications should also be taken with food.)

Alcohol, found in cocktails, beer or in cough syrups and other liquid medications can interact with your medications. Alcohol can block the

effects of some drugs and may intensify the effects of others. For example, alcohol combined with nitroglycerin can dangerously lower blood pressure. With other medications, alcohol use can make you overly drowsy. If you are taking Flagyl (metronidazole) to treat a yeast infection, using alcohol can result in extreme nausea and should be totally avoided until three days after your last dose.

Grapefruit juice is a harmless, healthy source of vitamins and is healthy on its own, but it can interact with numerous medications, potentially reducing the effects of some medications or increasing the risk of toxicity of some others, such as Cordarone (amiodarone), Valium (diazepam), Norvasc (amlodipine), Procardia (nifedipine) and most statin drugs used to treat cholesterol. Antacids, taken as directed, can help relieve the discomfort produced by too much stomach acid. But indiscriminate or long-term use of antacids can deplete phosphorus, a mineral necessary for ongoing bone and tooth health. Taking any calcium containing antacids with meals may also interfere with the iron absorption which may worsen the oxygen carrying capacity of your blood. This can further complicate healing and your energy level. And more importantly, ongoing ingestion may actually be something that warrants further medical review.

In addition to food and drug interactions, certain medications also affect taste sensation and appetite. For example, penicillin and Biaxin can make foods "taste funny" or like metal. Antihistamines and certain antidepressants can cause dry mouth, making it hard to chew and swallow. Certain painkillers and estrogens preparations may upset your stomach, while iron supplements are a frequent cause of constipation.

To keep food interactions at a minimum, follow these tips:

If you experience any unpleasant after taking a new medication--- or a medication that you have been taking for a while---tell your healthcare provider.

Let your healthcare provider know if you follow a special or restricted diet. Kosher diets may have unusually high sodium content, while traditional Asian diets may be high in both sodium and calcium. These

factors may affect the types or even the brands of drugs prescribed for you.

Always take your medicine at the time and in the manner prescribed. Taking too much, abruptly stopping or not taking your medication for the length of time prescribed can be dangerous.

With each medical check-up, review your medications, your lifestyle and your dietary habits. If you recently lost weight or become a vegetarian, your medication doses may need to be changed.

To get the greatest benefit from your medications, you must know when and how to take your special group of medications, supplements, etc. Read the directions printed on the containers and your patient instruction leaflets. Ask your pharmacist or other healthcare provider to clarify any of the instructions or other questions you may have. Food and drug interactions are almost always avoidable and manageable.

