

Dangers of Drug Interactions and Use of Multiple Medications

Unintended drug interactions may be deadly

Adverse drug reactions (ADR) are a significant public health issue that in many cases can be avoided. It's common for patients to see different doctors for various conditions, and in turn receive more than one prescription. Unfortunately, patients who have multiple doctors may not receive consistent guidance as to how the medications they are taking interact when taken together.

Why it's important for patients to be open and direct in talking with all their health care professionals about the medications and supplements they're taking

According to a 2017 [Consumer Reports](#) survey, more than half of American adults regularly take a prescription medication – four, on average – increasing the risk of harmful drug interactions. When prescriptions are combined with over-the-counter medications and herbal supplements, the risk increases. Even coffee or tea may be harmful due to caffeine, which can change how a patient may respond to medication. [According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#), more than 2 million serious ADRs, caused from one or multiple drugs, occur every year in the United States, leading to 100,000 deaths. ADRs are the fourth leading cause of death in the country, causing more deaths than pulmonary disease, diabetes, AIDS, pneumonia and car accidents.

How stigma may impact information discussions with patient

There may be situations where patients are afraid or embarrassed to talk about their medications, especially when it comes to antidepressants or other drugs used to treat mental illness. The stigma surrounding mental illness may lead to silence instead of sharing. It's important for patients to discuss all the medications they are taking with their health care professionals. Mental illness is not something to be ashamed of and is very common in the United States. [According to the National Institute of Mental Health](#), in 2015, there were an estimated 43 million adults 18 and older with a mental illness, representing nearly 18 percent of all adults in the United States.

Why it's important for patients to be open and direct in talking with all their health care professionals about their lifestyle, as well as the medications and supplements they're taking

- ✓ Consuming excessive caffeine, such as found in coffee and green tea, can cause problems.
- ✓ Smoking can lead to chemical reactions that impact a drug's effectiveness.
- ✓ Nutritional or dietary supplements can change how a patient responds to medication.
- ✓ Adverse drug interactions can impact the liver, kidney, skin, bone marrow, and other vital organs.

Know what your patients are taking

When discussing medications and other supplements with your patients, follow these important tips:

- Ask your patients to create and share a list of the medications and supplements they are taking, so they can discuss whether taking combinations of medications and supplements is safe.
- Discuss potential side effects, the correct time and sequence to take each medication or supplements, and what drugs should be taken with or without food.
- Encourage patients to share information with all of their health care professionals, including pharmacists and nurses, as well as your doctors. Also encourage patients to give permission for their health care professionals to communicate with each other. Explain to them that ongoing coordination between care providers will enable health care professionals to make the most appropriate medical decisions and give patients better access to the most up-to-date information about their course of treatment.



- Include supplements, caffeine use, and nicotine screening to routine medication reviews.
- Encourage patients to organize their medications by using a dosage schedule and pill box to ensure that medications are taken in the right amount at the right time of day or night.

References

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