



What Every Consumer Should Know:

Avoiding Drug Interactions

Many medications have effects in addition to the one desired and expected. The more medications you take, the greater the chance for them to overlap and cause problems.

Most medicines are broken down in the liver. When you're taking more than one medication, even for different reasons, the medicines may stay in your system longer because the liver can't clear them out as fast, so one or more of them can "pile up" and cause more side effects—even adverse drug reactions. Adverse drug reactions cause hospitalizations and deaths every year.

These steps will help you avoid un-wanted medication side effects, and guard against taking medications (prescription and non-prescription) that should not be combined.

- **Brown-bag it!** Give your medicines a yearly check-up. Make a "brown-bag" check-up part of your next visit with your doctor or pharmacist.
 - When you call to make the appointment with your doctor or pharmacist, let him or her know you will be bringing in all your medications.
 - Gather *all* of your current medications, both prescription and non-prescription, and show them to your doctor or pharmacist. He or she can check for any expired medications and potential interactions.
 - Many pharmacies and health plans hold brown-bag medication reviews as a service to customers—check with your pharmacy or health plan to find the next brown-bag review in your area.
- **Tell your physician and pharmacist about herbs and vitamin supplements you use.** Some supplements and herbs have unplanned effects and may interact with other drugs. What your doctor doesn't know about the non-prescribed medicine you use could hurt you.
- **When you notice any new symptom, ask your doctor right away** if it might be related to any medicine you are taking.
- **Check drug interactions online.** The Center for Drug Evaluation and Research has a complete listing of drug interaction information located at www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/druginteractions.htm. For a list of prescription medicine sites on the Internet, log onto www.cahd.org.