

Health Tips

Your Good Health Information From eDocAmerica

with

Dr. D



Printer Friendly



Health Tip: Does FDA Approval Assure the Safety of Medicines?

Have you ever heard anyone speculate that if aspirin had to undergo FDA scrutiny for approval as a new drug, that it would never pass? Perhaps this is an overstatement, but it does point out that the same medications most of us consider to be perfectly safe can lead to serious side effects in certain situations.

This concern also extends beyond just prescription medication. Over-the-counter medications, herbal remedies and drugs sold as "nutritional supplements", all have potential risks. To compound this situation, there is also the possibility that two medications that may not cause a problem by themselves can interact and produce an adverse reaction.



Almost every week I hear about a medication that has been taken off the market, found to be linked to previously unknown problems, argued about in court cases or that has received the FDA's "black box" warning, indicating that the drug carries more risks than most other prescription drugs. In recent years, the arthritis medication, Vioxx, the anti-depressant, Serzone and the diabetes medication Rezulin among others, have been taken off the market. This is in spite of careful analysis prior to their initial release that "confirmed" their safety. Over 200 prescription medications carry the "black box" warning, which often is just a step short of pulling the medication off of the market.

How to avoid problems:

1. Unless it's absolutely necessary, don't take medications. This is being overly simplistic since the fact is, no matter how healthy a lifestyle that we live, some health problems are beyond our control. This is often true with hypertension, high cholesterol and with certain inherited diseases. For many medical problems, however, there is real opportunity for "lifestyle management". Losing weight, exercising regularly and eating a nutritious diet is effective in reducing the



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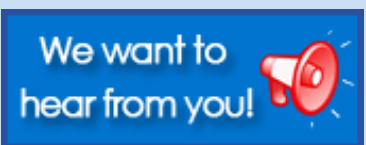
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risk or managing a number of medical conditions such as diabetes and coronary heart disease. Also, resist the need to take antibiotics for viral illness such as the common cold. They won't help you get over the cold any sooner and taking them indiscriminately can lead to the development of "super bugs" that are resistant to most antibiotics.

2. In considering whether a medication is appropriate to take, you and your doctor should consider the following:

- *Does your condition warrant the use of a medication?
- *What other medications or supplements are you taking that could interact with this new medication?
- *Are there any reasonable options other than the use of a medication?
- *Do you have any allergies or sensitivities that could make taking this medication dangerous?
- *What are the potential side effects of the medication?

Ask yourself the same questions when considering taking an OTC medication, herbal product, vitamin or supplement. Even though these products may not require a prescription, it is best to let your doctor know that you are taking them.

3. When medications are required, make sure that you are taking the safest medication in the class of drugs that is used for the condition. Often this is one that has been around the longest, rather than the latest and greatest. In most cases, the lowest effective dosage of the medication will also be less likely to cause side effects. For some conditions, medications can be discontinued following effective treatment. For others, such as hypertension, medications may need to be taken indefinitely.
4. Monitor for side effects. For many medications, periodic blood testing is recommended to monitor for side effects. Find out the recommended testing interval and assume some of the responsibility for making sure that the appropriate testing is done. Learn the side effects that have been reported in association with your particular medications. The [Drugs, Supplements, and Herbal Information](#) index at Medline Plus is a good source for this type of information.
5. Read the news. By following the Health section of Google News each day, I frequently read about new medicines receiving warnings or that are being defended in a court case. While doctors and pharmaceutical companies have a responsibility to alert patients to newly discovered medication concerns, you should stay alert for new developments regarding your medications also.

If you have questions regarding your medications, help is just an email away to one of our eDocs who'll be happy to help you out.

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