



At the Pharmacy

Herbs, Vitamins and Minerals

People who are seeking better health and a sense of well-being are increasingly turning to supplements such as herbs, vitamins and minerals. Other people looking for a "natural" way to treat a variety of conditions also find these supplements attractive. However, there are some things to consider beforehand.

Large doses of herbs, vitamins or minerals act as more than nutritional supplements; they act like regular medications. Thus, they can have serious interactions with other medications, certain foods, or alcohol.

Vitamins and minerals are relatively unregulated in the United States compared to the pharmaceutical industry. Manufacturers of herbal medicines, vitamins and minerals can bring their products to market without the rigorous scientific research or testing that prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications receive. The results of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Issue Highlights

Antibiotics and Antibiotic Resistance **01**



Herbs, Vitamins and Minerals **01**



Getting the Most from Your Medication **02**

Stretching Your Dollars at the Pharmacy



Antibiotics and Antibiotic Resistance

Antibiotics are medications that are used to kill bacterial infections. Since the 1940s, they have become widely used to battle many diseases. Unfortunately, antibiotics have become so popular that they often are used inappropriately for illnesses for which they have no effect. Now, some serious bacterial infections are becoming less responsive to treatment as they are becoming resistant to antibiotics.

Antibiotics kill most harmful bacteria, but also kill some "friendly" bacteria that can actually help fight the bad bacteria. Consequently, the body provides favorable conditions for any surviving harmful bacteria to evolve, become resistant to the antibiotic, and multiply more freely. When that happens, the bacteria have become antibiotic-resistant "superbugs," and can even be passed from person to person.

Using antibiotics for the wrong types of illnesses (such as viral infections), not taking them correctly (for example, not taking all the medication as prescribed), and taking them too often all contribute to antibiotic resistance.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the current levels of antibiotic resistance are now a "major

global threat" to public health. Without immediate action, the WHO believes we are headed toward a "post-antibiotic era," where people will die from simple infections that were once easily treated. Here is what you can do to ensure you are using antibiotics properly:

- ✓ Never ask for or take antibiotics for a viral illness. Antibiotics do not work against the viral infections that cause most coughs, colds, and the flu.
- ✓ While antibiotics are effective in treating many bacterial infections, not every infection requires an antibiotic. Often, your body can cure the infection on its own.
- ✓ When your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, be sure to ask if it is necessary.
- ✓ When taking an antibiotic, take it exactly as directed. Take all of it until it is gone, even if you are feeling better. Otherwise, the strongest bacteria can survive, which may lead to a relapse and the growth of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
- ✓ Do not save any medication to treat yourself or others later. Antibiotic prescriptions are tailored to your particular infection. Low doses can help resistant bacteria to develop and grow. ♦

Getting the Most from Your Medication

Taking medications may seem like a simple task because the instructions are on the container. While that's true, there's more to the safe and effective use of drugs than what will fit on the label. Here are some tips on how to get the best—and safest—results from your medication.

First, you should know what your medication is supposed to do for you. You will also need to know whether there are particular times and procedures for taking it. Your doctor is your best source for this information, but you can also check with your pharmacist. Make sure to ask the right questions to get all the right information:

- ✓ How long will it take this medicine to start working?
- ✓ How can I recognize an allergic reaction?
- ✓ What side effects can I expect, and how soon should I report them?
- ✓ Is a certain time of day best for taking the medication?
- ✓ Should I take it before, during, or after eating?
- ✓ Should I avoid taking it with certain foods or drinks?
- ✓ What should I do if I miss a dose?
- ✓ Should I avoid the sun or any activities while taking this medication?

- ✓ May I continue taking all other medications while on this drug? Can I take them all together?
- ✓ May I use the generic version?
- ✓ How long should I take this drug?

In general, there are several things you can do to make taking a prescription as safe and easy as possible.

- Drink water to lubricate your esophagus before taking a pill.
- Shake liquid medication thoroughly.
- Use a measuring spoon, NOT a kitchen spoon, for liquid medication.
- Use a checklist or drug-organizing container if you need to take multiple drugs at different times of the day.
- Keep all medications in their original containers to avoid mistakes.
- Keep all medications out of children's reach, direct sunlight, the freezer, humid conditions, and hot automobiles.
- Do not mix tablets or capsules into food without consulting your doctor.
- Refrain from drinking alcohol while taking prescription medications.
- Consult your doctor before taking any drug if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or are breast-feeding. ◇

Stretching Your Dollars at the Pharmacy

As prescription drug costs rise, you probably feel the pinch in your wallet. But there are some simple things you can do to help save money on your prescriptions.

- Be sure to ask your doctor about other medication options, for example, OTC medications. Sometimes these can be just as effective.
- Generic versions of brand-name drugs are much less expensive, and the FDA requires that generic drugs meet the same stringent guidelines as all brand-name drugs.
- If there is no generic version available of the drug you are prescribed, ask your doctor if there is a less expensive brand-name you could try instead.
- Sometimes splitting high dosage tablets or capsules in half can save you more money than taking a whole pill of a low dose. However, some medications become ineffective when split, so make sure to check with your doctor before asking about this option.
- Check if your doctor has any free samples that you could have. ◇



© 2004 - 2008, 2012, 2014 Zywave, Inc. All rights reserved.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Herbs, Vitamins and Minerals

using these supplements vary. Some are effective, some are ineffective, and some can even be dangerous. Ask the following questions before using any nutritional supplements:

- Is there reliable information about this product? What is its safety history?
- Does the product information come from its manufacturer, or from a reliable independent source?
- What are the potential health benefits? Are there any potential risks? Do the benefits outweigh the risks?
- What is the appropriate dosage?
- How will the supplement interact with other medications I am taking?
- Is it possible to take too much?
- Are there any side effects?

Always consult your doctor before using any herbal remedies or large doses of vitamins and minerals. For more information, visit the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Web site at <http://1.usa.gov/1zZU5eu>. ◇

