

# Let's Talk About: Drugs



ST. PAUL'S HOSPITAL  
COMMUNITY FORUMS

Medications have become a crucial component of good medical care and help patients live healthier and more functional lives.

There are people with medical conditions who take more than one medicine at a time. Some people also see more than one doctor for different reasons. In addition, the number of medications often increases as people get older. As a result, some people are given new prescription drugs without thoroughly assessing their other medications. Negative interactions and side effects between prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, dietary supplements (both herbal and mineral) and various foods can occur.

## Types of Drug Interactions

**Drug-Drug Interactions** - are experienced when two or more medicines react with each other resulting in unwelcomed side effects. Taking a sedative or sleeping pill together with anti-allergy drug or antihistamine can slow down one's reactions making car driving or operating machineries too risky and can make reading a book difficult.

**Drug-Food/Beverage Interactions** - occur when drugs react with foods or beverages. For example, mixing alcohol with some drugs may cause a feeling of fatigue or slow your reactions.

**Drug-Condition Interactions** - may happen when an existing medical condition makes certain drugs potentially harmful. An example of this is when someone has high blood pressure; there could be an experience of adverse reaction if you take a nasal decongestant as it can elevate blood pressure.

## Effects of Drug Interactions

The effects of drug interactions may be as mild as making your drug less effective, or it can cause unexpected side effects such as drowsiness, palpitations or dizziness. It can also increase the action of a particular drug which can be detrimental.

## Simple Questions to ask Yourself

1. Is this medication helping me?  
For example, does the pain medication help the pain? Does the antidepressant help my mood?
2. Are there any side effects that I can feel? (What side effects can I expect?)
3. Does the balance between beneficial effects (e.g. pain relief) and side effects (e.g. slow thinking, constipation) justify continuing the medication?
4. If you don't know something about a drug, ask your Pharmacists or Doctor.

## Safety Precautions

Consult with your health care professionals about the medicines and supplements you take. Every time your physician would give a new prescription, be sure to discuss all OTC and prescription drugs, dietary supplements, vitamins, botanicals, minerals and herbal supplements you take including the food that you eat. See to it that whenever you buy medicines from the pharmacy, the package insert for each prescription drug is included for it will provide you with more information about potential drug interactions.

*Source: Drug Interactions: The Dangers of Mixing up Medicines*

Join medical experts from Providence Health Care for monthly community forums at St. Paul's Hospital. Each month features a different health topic with time to pose questions to the experts.

The forums are free and take place the third Wednesday of most months.

7:00 – 9:00 pm  
(doors open at 6:30)  
New Lecture Theatre  
St. Paul's Hospital  
1081 Burrard Street

For more information and to register, please email [ownyourhealth@providencehealth.bc.ca](mailto:ownyourhealth@providencehealth.bc.ca) or call 604-806-8495.

This evening's presentation will be available to view on our website:

[www.phcmedicine.ca](http://www.phcmedicine.ca)

