



Central Office: 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT 06109 Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823
Berlin: 240 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT 06037 Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248
Newington: 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT 06111 Phone (860) 665-8586 Fax (860) 665-8533
Rocky Hill: 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067 Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax (860) 258-2767
www.ccthd.org

March 25, 2008

Do Your Part to Avoid Medication Errors

One of the “tricks” to healthy eating is to be sure to read labels when grocery shopping. But are we as diligent when buying medication? In a report issued by the Centers for Disease Control, 44% of Americans take at least one prescription medication, and about 17% take three or more prescriptions. Every year, Americans spend over \$220 billion on medications, and, according to [National Council on Patient Information and Education](#), \$177 billion more is spent correcting problems caused by that medication. When one considers the availability of over 1000 “over-the-counter” (OTC) drugs and numerous supplements and herbal remedies, the possibility of an adverse drug interaction is enormous.

In an effort to reduce medication errors, the week of 4/1 – 4/7/08 has been designated Medication Safety Week. Considering the large numbers of people served by medical professionals, many of whom use multiple medications, it is unrealistic to expect the “experts” to be infallible. While doctors, nurses, and pharmacists try to prevent such errors, the consumer/patient must be a partner as well. When using prescription medications, these tips can help reduce the risk of error:

1. Ask the doctor to write the name of the medicine (both brand and generic) and what it is supposed to do.
2. Find out how to take the medicine (empty stomach, with food, etc.) and for how long.
3. What foods, drinks, supplements, or other medications should be avoided?
4. What are the possible side effects, and how are they treated?
5. What do you do if you miss a dose?
6. Will there be any adverse interaction with other drugs being taken?
7. Be sure you have informed your doctor about all other medications you take, including prescriptions, OTC drugs, vitamins, and herbal supplements.
8. Inspect the medication when picking up the prescription; make sure your name and the name of the drug are correct.
9. Get to know what the drug looks like. If it appears different when refilled, or there is a price change, ask the pharmacist if it is the same medication.
10. Read and keep the information about the medication that is included.
11. Try to buy all prescriptions from the same pharmacy.

Even if you are fortunate enough not to be using prescription medication, the chances are good your medicine chest contains some over-the-counter drugs. These, too, can result in negative drug interactions. In May 2002, all over-the-counter drugs were required by the Food and Drug Administration to carry a standard label which itemizes such information as the active and inactive ingredients, how to take the medicine, what it is to be used for, and warnings. Before purchasing either OTC drugs or other supplements and vitamins, read the label. If you have questions, ask the pharmacist for help.

Drug interactions can be serious. They can cause a dangerous drop in blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, a build-up of toxins in the liver, and even death. At a minimum, the interaction can decrease the effectiveness of

one or both drugs being used, sometimes leading to complications of the condition being treated.

If you have not already done so, make a list of all the medications (prescription, OTC, vitamins, supplements) you take during Medications Safety Week. Be sure to keep one list, and provide a copy to your doctor at your next office visit. To learn more about drug safety, visit the [National Council on Patient Information and Education](http://www.NationalCouncilonPatientInformationandEducation.org)'s website at www.BeMedwise.org. (301-656-8565). Information is also available through the Food and Drug Administration at www.fda.gov and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov. The Central Connecticut Health District has information about this and other public health topics at www.ccthd.org (860-721-28