

GENERAL INFORMATION

What are Drug Interactions?

A drug interaction can occur when a drug is taken with another substance—prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, alcohol, herbs, supplements, food, water etc. There are many types of potential interactions that have the possibility of increasing/decreasing drug levels in the body that could lead to the development of drug resistance. It could also cause the drugs to be ineffective to treat the condition because the blood levels are too low, or trigger an overdose because the drug levels are too high. Certain drug interactions can cause death.

Listed below are examples of interactions:

- **Drugs and herbal medications:** St. John's wort lowers the drug levels of HIV and HCV protease inhibitors making them less likely to treat HIV or HCV and could lead to drug resistance.
- **Drug-Drug:** Ritonavir is an HIV medication that is widely used to increase the blood levels of certain HIV and HCV medications. Ribavirin is a common HCV medication that should not be used with didanosine because of severe drug-drug interactions that may cause liver failure.
- **Drug and food or drink interaction:** Many drugs are affected when taken with food or drink. For instance grapefruit (and juice) can lower the blood levels of ritonavir and the statin drug-simvastatin (used to lower cholesterol levels). Alcohol is one of the most common drinks that can have interactions with a variety of drugs like diabetes medications and anti-depressants.
- **Overdosing:** Acetaminophen (Tylenol, Paracetamol—contained in over 600 other products) results in 56,000 emergency room visits and 500 deaths every year, especially if taken with alcohol.

educate yourself

Check this out:

- The bottom line is that any medicine, herb, food, or drink has the potential to interact with other drugs. The most important thing that people can do to avoid potential drug interactions is to tell your medical provider about any prescribed or over-the-counter medications, herbs or anything else you are taking. A really good resource is your drugstore pharmacist – they know about all types of drug interactions.

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