

How Will the Side Effects Affect You?

As I grow older, I find that my pill organizer grows larger. While I used to take just a single multivitamin each day, my daily routine now also includes various vitamin supplements, a preventative allergy medication, and even a medication prescribed by my doctor. Adding the prescription medication in recent months was not a decision I made lightly. Before adding it to my daily regimen, my doctor and I discussed what I was already taking, including the quantities and frequencies.

No matter the medication being added, you should always take time to understand what the added dose will do for you, what the specific instructions are for dosage, and how it will affect you. It is probably no surprise that prescription medications can cause side effects, also known as adverse reactions.

Whether taking a prescription medication or something over the counter, side effects from medications are fairly common, but everyone is different. Side effects might arise when we start taking a new medication, when we stop taking a medication, or when we change our dosage of a medication. Some common side effects include drowsiness, insomnia, upset stomach, increased/decreased appetite, anxiety, or gastrointestinal issues. Certain medications may also cause more serious side effects such as kidney or liver damage. I'm sure you have heard one of those drug commercials where the last 15 seconds are filled with a speed-reader's very long list of potential side effects and potentially fatal adverse reactions. Those warnings are enough to catch my attention!

When we consider adding vitamins to our daily routine, we may take for granted the effect they too can have on our bodies. They are vitamins after all, and must be good for us, right? Vitamins can have positive benefits on our physical well-being; however, some can alter the way our bodies absorb or metabolize medications. Always research and/or talk with a medical professional before taking anything new.

When you experience a medication side effect, you should work with your pharmacist or doctor to discuss your options or call 911 if you are in medical distress. Perhaps adjusting your dosage or switching to a different medication will help lessen or even eliminate the adverse reactions. Even before we start taking a new medication, however, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends some ways we can reduce our risk of side effects.¹ These include:

- Ask your pharmacist or doctor about any possible side effects and what steps can be taken to reduce the risks of an adverse reaction. For example, it may be recommended that you take the medication with food rather than on an empty stomach, or at bedtime rather than in the morning.
- Ask questions about the medication when you receive your prescription. Review the medication guides and patient information included with your medication before taking the first dose.
- Carefully review the pharmacy label and any special stickers on the medication bottle or box. This information may provide important instructions on how to take the medication and its possible side effects.

Know what you are putting into your body, and don't let the side effects sidetrack you!



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¹ Food and Drug Administration, August 8, 2022, *Finding and Learning about Side Effects (Adverse Reactions)*, <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/information-consumers-and-patients-drugs/finding-and-learning-about-side-effects-adverse-reactions>