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How Can I Avoid These Interactions?

- Read the label on medicines and supplements. Pay close attention to any warnings on the label.
- Keep all your health care providers informed about all supplements and medicines you take, and of any changes to what you eat (dairy free, vegan, gluten free, etc.)
- Ask your health care provider or pharmacist what foods, beverages, and supplements to avoid while taking your medicine(s).

Did you know that...

- a 2021-2023 study showed that roughly 40% of U.S. adults used two or more dietary supplements regularly?

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Food and Supplement Interactions with Medicines

Many people take supplements like vitamins, minerals, and herbs to improve their health. However, supplements aren't always safe and can interact with medicines you take or foods you eat. Even "natural" products can potentially cause harm.

How Do Foods or Supplements Affect My Medicines?

Our bodies use enzymes to break down medicines. Certain foods and supplements can speed up or slow down these enzymes, changing how medicines work. This can increase or decrease their effects or cause side effects such as changes in heart rate or blood pressure, bleeding, or drowsiness. When taken alone and as directed, these foods and supplements are generally low risk. However, taking them with certain medicines or in large amounts can increase the risk of harmful interactions and side effects. Here are some examples:

- **St John's Wort:** interacts with medicines that increase serotonin or act on serotonin receptors. Increasing serotonin levels too high can increase blood pressure, heart rate, and temperature to life-threatening levels. It can also increase sensitivity to the sun.
- **Aged, fermented, and cured foods:** high in tyramine which can interact with monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) medicines and increase blood pressure to life-threatening levels.
- **Dairy products:** high in calcium and can bind to certain medicines, making them less effective.
- **Leafy, green vegetables:** high in Vitamin K which can interact with the blood thinning medicine warfarin. Too much Vitamin K can lower the effectiveness of warfarin and cause blood to clot more easily.
- **Dong quai/Garlic/Ginger/Ginkgo/Ginseng/Glucosamine/Vitamin E:** can increase bleeding risk, especially when combined with blood thinning medicines.
- **Alcohol:** can cause increased risk of drowsiness, slow or difficulty breathing, fainting, heart problems, and overdose.
- **Caffeine:** in very large amounts, caffeine can increase blood pressure and heart rate, especially when combined with other medicines that can increase blood pressure and heart rate.

Interactions with Sensitive Medicines

Some medicines have a "narrow therapeutic range", meaning the amount in your body must stay within a specific level. Some foods and supplements can change medicine levels and push them outside their safe range, which can cause serious or life-threatening effects. Examples of these medicines include:

- Digoxin: used for heart failure or abnormal heart rhythm
- Warfarin: used as a blood thinner
- Phenytoin: used to prevent seizures
- Cyclosporine: used to prevent organ transplant rejection

Interactions with Surgery Medicines

Before surgery, tell your health care provider about any supplements you take. Supplements may change the way your body responds to medicine given before, during, or after the surgery and may cause serious effects. Your provider may recommend you stop taking the supplement(s) before surgery.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a food, supplement, or medicine interaction or have related questions call the Maryland Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

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