



# Did your medication do that?

*Dr Paul Martiquet, Medical Health Officer*

**The things we ingest or imbibe** all have an effect on our bodies. Whether it is a cold glass of orange juice

(vitamins, nutrition), an herbal remedy or a prescribed drug, all interact in the body, and some of those interactions are not entirely welcome.

An adverse drug reaction (or ADR) is when there is an unwanted effect resulting from taking a medication. They can be minor inconveniences, or life-threatening events. Being aware of the possibility of an ADR when taking a new drug, or adding one to an existing regimen can help prevent serious complications. In other words, yes, you should always read that page or more of information your pharmacist gives you.

The adverse reactions to a drug can be classed into five categories. First is an allergy to the drug itself. This results when the body's immune system kicks in to fight what it perceives to be an invader. The effects can range from very mild such as a light rash or hives, to extreme like anaphylaxis. More moderate reactions include swollen or aching joints. Certain drugs are more likely to cause allergic reactions, including penicillin and codeine for example.

Side effects are our next concern. These are unwanted and undesirable effects caused by the medication. Again, read that leaflet from the pharmacy, but don't be sidetracked by the extremely rare ones — just be aware.

Specific side effects could be related to dosage or could be just temporary. If they persist, your doctor might switch to an alternate drug. If the side effects are severe, seek medication attention right away.

For example, blurred vision, memory loss, lethargy,

disorientation, high fever, difficulty breathing, chest pains.... Additional information about side effects is also available from Health Canada.

One type of ADR arises from interaction with the foods you eat. These can affect how your body takes in a drug, how fast it leaves your system, or how much is available to your body. The key is to follow instructions — taken with food or on an empty stomach? Avoid certain foods?

There could also be interaction with other drugs be they prescription, over the counter or herbal/alternative. The two could have an additive effect if they share side effects, and be compounded. For example, alcohol and codeine (as in Tylenol 3) both sedate. Alternately, they could have contradictory effects with one counteracting the other, negating benefits of both.

And the fifth category is how a drug interacts with an existing medical condition. Some drugs are not suitable for some patients. A good example is someone with high blood pressure needs to avoid decongestants and anti-inflammatory medication like ibuprofen as they raise blood pressure.

Whatever medication you take, in whatever form, including 'natural' remedies, be aware of the possibility of interaction. While an itchy rash may be uncomfortable, the more serious of side effects could be very harmful, even fatal. Talk to your physician and pharmacist about what you are taking — they can help.

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