Hepatitis C Treatment and Drug Interactions

June 29, 2015 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Last week in *When Hepatitis C Treatment is Hard and Scary*, I wrote about side effects of hepatitis C treatment. This week I focus on potential drug interactions. Side effects and drug interactions are connected because if your hepatitis C medication is interacting with another drug or supplement, you may experience some problems.

Drugs, alcohol, supplements, and food may interact with drugs (and each other). It does not matter whether the drug is prescribed, over-the-counter, or illicit - all have the potential to interact.

There are various types of drug and supplement interactions. For simplicity's sake, I'll break them down to three types:

Duplication - When two drugs or supplements with the same effect are taken, thus intensifying their side effects. This occurs if you take two drugs that have the same active ingredient. This may happen if your doctor prescribes something that has the same ingredient that is in another drug, because either the doctor didn't check what you were taking, or a different doctor prescribed the other drug. It can also occur because you were unaware that the drug was in more than one over-the-counter remedy that you were taking. For example, an allergy pill and a sleep aid might both contain diphenhydramine.

Opposition (antagonism) - When a drug, food, or supplement reduces or blocks the effect of a drug, supplement, or both. For instance, licorice root may interfere with birth control hormones, thus reducing the effectiveness of this contraceptive method.

Alteration - In this case, a drug alters how the body absorbs, distributes, metabolizes, or excretes another drug. There are varieties of ways in which drugs can do this. A synergistic interaction means that two or more drugs work together against one target, producing an effect that is greater than the individual effect of the two drugs together. Further, drugs can also potentiate or boost effects. Drug A may boost the effects of drug B, but it may also increase the intensity of drug B's side effects.

Tips to Help You Reduce Your Risk of Drug Interactions

- Talk to your medical provider and your pharmacist before taking a new drug. This includes over-the-counter medicines, dietary supplements, herbs, and illicit drugs.
- Read the prescribing information that comes with the drug. Check for potential interactions at hep-druginterations.org. I also check what I take on Drugs.com.
- Keep a list of all drugs and supplements that you take. Share this with your entire healthcare team.
- Use a pharmacy that allows you to maintain a record of your medications. If you use multiple pharmacies, be sure you share information with all of them.
- Take drugs per your doctor's instructions. Be sure you know when to take them, how to take them, and whether they can be taken during the same time as other medicines you take.
- Stay current. Even if you took a drug before, find out if there have been new interactions added to that drug's safety profile.
- Never break, crush, or dissolve a pill, tablet, or capsule without making sure this is all right to do. Some medications need to be intact so they are not destroyed by stomach acids. If you have difficulty swallowing pills tell your doctor.
- If you pick up a prescription and the medication looks different from the last time you took it, talk to your pharmacist to make sure there has not been an error.
- Report to the doctor or pharmacist any symptoms that might be experiencing while taking a drug.

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