Safe Medication Management for Seniors: Let’s Talk About Common Drug Interactions

“The older you get, the more likely you are to use additional medicines, which can increase the chance of harmful drug effects, including interactions.”

This finding by the FDA shows a growing need to ensure safe medication management, especially as we age. Along with taking medicine as prescribed, it’s important to understand the interactions possible between drugs and the things we eat. Keep reading to find a shortlist of common food and drug interactions.

Common Food and Drug Interactions

- **Antibiotics and Dairy** – Calcium binds to antibiotics in the stomach and upper intestine. This creates a substance that cannot be absorbed by the body, thus decreasing the effectiveness of the medicine. This interaction occurs with foods like milk, yogurt, and cheese. To avoid this interaction, take antibiotics one or two hours before a meal.
- **Grapefruit** – Be especially careful with grapefruit when taking medications, since the juice can increase the dosage level of certain drugs. This interaction is common with drugs taken for impotence, cholesterol levels, and high blood pressure.
- **Acetaminophen and Alcohol** – Two or more alcoholic drinks per day greatly increases the liver toxicity of this over-the-counter pain reliever. And, since the liver’s ability to diminish drugs decreases with age, this interaction is more common in older adults.
- **Warfarin and Vitamin K** – Warfarin, commonly known as Coumadin, is a blood thinner that helps treat and prevent blood clots. Eating foods high in vitamin K, especially green leafy vegetables, can diminish the drug’s effectiveness. This isn’t to say you have to avoid these foods completely – but keep daily intake consistent and in moderation.
- **Antithyroid and Iodine-Rich Foods** – Antithyroid drugs interfere with the body’s production of thyroid hormones that work by preventing iodine absorption in the stomach. If you have an iodine-rich diet that includes foods like seafood and iodized salt, a higher dosage of an antithyroid would be necessary. However, a higher dosage could put you at an increased risk of side effects
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that include rashes, hives, and liver disease.

Although this list is a good start and brings awareness to potential interactions, it is vital to talk to your doctor about the medications you take. Try to discuss prescription and over-the-counter medicines you regularly use with your doctor each visit - and if that’s not possible, set a yearly appointment to review your medications.

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