



What You Should Know About Dangerous Drug Interactions

(NAPS)—Learning more about dangerous drug interactions could save your life.

For example, many people may assume that it's okay to take an over-the-counter remedy with a prescription drug, but this decision could provoke a serious health risk.

"Patients often mistakenly believe over-the-counter medications or herbal remedies are safe under all circumstances because they can buy these products at the supermarket or health food store without a prescription," said Andrew Garling, M.D., senior vice president of clinical operations for AdvancePCS, a leading health improvement company. "Most common nonprescription therapies can have serious effects when taken with certain prescription medications."

The potential for dangerous interactions is huge. About two-thirds of the nation's population currently uses medicines. According to government estimates, Americans buy nearly \$11 billion in over-the-counter drugs annually. The sale of herbal remedies represents a market exceeding \$2 billion—excluding vitamins and minerals.

Surveys commissioned by AdvancePCS confirm many people are unaware that common—and seemingly harmless—herbal remedies and over-the-counter medications can be dangerous when combined with certain prescription medications. For example:

- Taking a prescription blood thinner, such as Coumadin, with an herbal remedy containing garlic, could cause uncontrolled bleeding and/or excessive bruising.
- Combining prescription pain



Combining a prescription pain medication and an over-the-counter pain remedy could result in liver damage.

relievers containing acetaminophen, such as Percocet or Darvocet, with nonprescription cold remedies containing acetaminophen, such as Tylenol Cold or Contact Cold, could cause liver damage.

- Taking St. John's Wort, a natural remedy for depression, with a prescription antidepressant such as Prozac, could cause agitation, confusion, sleeplessness, and elevated blood pressure.

"Your health care professional can help you use medications safely and properly—if you keep him or her informed about all the prescription and over-the-counter remedies you are taking," Garling said.

AdvancePCS recommends that people keep a written record of all prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, herbal remedies, and vitamin supplements they use so it's easy to share the information with their physicians and pharmacists.