

# Safety first before mixing drugs

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Billions of people across the globe take medications each day. Certain medications can help people with potentially debilitating or even deadly conditions live normal lives, while others can help people overcome relatively minor issues like muscle aches or seasonal allergies.

The American Heart Association notes that mixing drugs can produce unexpected side effects. This can make it dangerous for people already on prescription medications to use over-the-counter drugs for issues like headache or seasonal allergies. Understanding the potential interactions between their prescriptions and common prescription and over-the-counter medications can help people stay safe.

• **Antihistamines:** Antihistamines are widely used to alleviate symptoms of the common cold or seasonal allergies, such as runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing. The AHA notes that, when taken along with blood pressure medication, antihistamines can contribute to an accelerated heart rate and cause blood pressure

to spike. The AHA also cautions people taking sedatives, tranquilizers or prescriptions to treat high blood pressure or depression to consult their physicians before taking antihistamines.

• **Bronchodilators:** Bronchodilators relax and open the airways in the lungs and are used to treat various lung conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. These drugs make it easier to breathe and are available via prescriptions. But patients with heart disease, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, and/or diabetes should discuss the potential interactions between bronchodilators and other medications they may be taking with their physicians.

• **Cordarone:** According to Drugs.com, Cordarone is used to treat potentially deadly abnormal heartbeats. Cordarone can cause severe problems that affect the lungs, thyroid or liver, and can be dangerous when combined with other drugs. For example, the AHA notes that patients who take more than 20 milligrams of Zocor, a drug used to lower "bad" chole-

sterol and potentially to lower the risk of stroke, heart attack and other conditions, while also taking Cordarone are at risk of developing rhabdomyolysis. Rhabdomyolysis is a condition marked by the breakdown of muscle tissue that can lead to kidney failure or death. The AHA also says that Cordarone can inhibit or reduce the effects of the blood thinner Coumadin.

• **Nicotine replacement products:** People taking prescriptions for depression or asthma should consult their physicians before taking any nicotine replacement products. The Federal Drug Administration notes that doctors may want to change dosages of patients' current medications before recommending they take any nicotine replacement products. The FDA also advises people to speak with their physicians before trying these products if they have diabetes, heart disease, asthma or stomach ulcers; have had a recent heart attack; have high blood pressure but do not take any medication for it; or have a history of irregular heartbeat.



Drug interactions can complicate treatment of various conditions. People currently on medication are urged to speak with their physicians before taking any new medicines, including over-the-counter drugs.



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