

TAKING DRUGS?

Dear Dr. McCrummen, Your last article on herbs and foods was very interesting. I take many drugs and herbs, too, and am concerned with mixing them. Do you have any information on that topic? What is the difference between naturopathy, homeopathy, herbs, and drugs? M.S.

'Drugs' are, by definition, substances "intended for use in the diagnosis, cure, treatment, or prevention of disease", i.e. penicillin, vaccinations. 'Medicine' is a substance used to treat a disease, and can be a drug or potion *not* used to treat a disease, i.e. birth control pills, Viagra, ibuprofen. 'Homeopathy' ('same suffering') is "The art of curing upon resemblances", treating like with like. It is a practice of giving a person with certain symptoms small doses of a substance that would produce the same symptoms in a healthy person with higher doses. 'Naturopathy' is a treatment of ailments using natural things, such as sunlight, air, water, diet and lifestyle changes, herbs or plant extracts, acupuncture, and skin manipulation. The present use of the words defined above varies the same as many words used these days vary from their original meaning.

Specific plants may be used for seasoning foods, and are called herbs. Most plant derived remedies are considered 'herbs' or extracts. Plants were used to treat health problems long before man-made medicines were developed. Many medicines are either derived from plants, or are synthetically made similar in chemical structure. Modern prescription drugs help millions of people live better and longer lives. They are tested, officially approved, and can be patented. Herbs can be tested, but cannot be patented since they are a naturally growing substance, so there is not much money to be made from them for clinical research. Herb/supplement companies must state on the bottles that their products are not intended for use like a drug because the FDA has not tested or approved them. Taking herbal supplements can be dangerous and the FDA does not want to be responsible since they are sold "over-the-corner" against their wishes. There is quite a difference in the effectiveness and treatment time using modern medicines as compared to herbs, and there are no known herbal remedies for many ailments. I once asked a friend at a dental clinic in Xian, China, what method he preferred. He said, "If I had the time, I prefer the traditional Chinese method, but if I am in a hurry I choose modern medicine. I am always in a hurry to get well".

Herbs and supplements can cause reactions with each other and other medicines. Thinking back to chemistry class, when different chemicals were added together in a beaker they produced a totally different end-chemical, or a reaction. When a person takes a handful of herbs and/or medications all at once, the combination can lead to side effects, a reaction, or you may not get the result you desire from each one. If you were to take a heart medication, one for blood pressure, arthritis, depression, inflammation, pain, allergies, upset stomach, and yeast infection, how will each drug know where to go when they are mixed together in your stomach? What is the final chemical, and what might the reaction be? People may have different reactions to medications because most take different combinations. Tell your doctor if you take any herbs or supplements, and ask which drugs should be taken at different times.

If simply eating a grapefruit can alter the drugs we take for heart disease, birth control, cold and allergy medication, and many others, what else might we be eating that can alter your drugs and cause unexpected results? Taking calcium supplements with vitamins and minerals, or in the form of TUMS, or even milk, are very important for most people, but if taken at the same time as thyroid medication, some antibiotics, iron, beta blockers, L-lysine (for cold sores), it can lessen the benefits of the drug, or cause serious side effects. There are many interactions with foods, herbs, supplements, and medicines that are not yet known. Check with the drug expert that has been educated to help you with your medicines; your pharmacist. What they do not know they can find out for you; medicines are their specialty. Ask your physician or dentist and they can help. Search the internet. Become informed about what you are putting into your body, it is the only one you get.