

Ask Your Pharmacist

Avoid Drug Interaction By Seeking Out The Pharmacist

(NAPSA)—Prescription drugs. Over-the-counter medications. Supplements. For many people, taking multiple medications and supplements for multiple conditions are part of everyday life. While these medicines and supplements can improve one's health, they also can cancel each other out if not taken correctly. And, some medicines can even be harmful if combined.

Figuring out what goes with what has become more of a challenge, as the FDA has started to reclassify certain prescription medications as over-the-counter or "OTC" products that can be bought off the pharmacy shelf without a prescription.

For example, consumers can now treat frequent heartburn with some of the strongest gastrointestinal drugs ever to be made available directly to consumers. But, at the same time these drugs are reducing heartburn, they are also reducing the effectiveness of some calcium supplements. Drugs known as proton pump inhibitors, such as Prevacid®, Prilosec OTC® and other heartburn treatments stop acid production in the stomach. And, when gastric acid is low, the absorption of calcium supplements made from calcium carbonate can be negatively affected.

There are other options. Because it is well-absorbed, a calcium citrate supplement, such as Citracal®, can be taken at any time, with or without food. It is not reliant upon stomach acid and it is less likely to cause gas or bloating.

"If they are confused about which OTC to take, people should ask their pharmacist," said Dr. Jan Engle, immediate past president of the American Pharmacists



Association (APhA) and current APhA OTC Advisor. "People must protect themselves against potential interactions. The good news is that there are often solutions to which pharmacists can direct consumers. For example, those on heartburn drugs should check with their pharmacist to see if they should switch from a calcium carbonate to a calcium citrate product."

Stopping calcium altogether may not be an appropriate option. Millions of people depend on a calcium supplement to provide an essential nutrient that helps keep the body working properly. While many know that calcium helps keep bones and teeth strong, there are many more benefits of calcium, such as keeping heartbeat regular and blood flowing and maintaining nerve and muscle health. Effective calcium supplementation is vital for those with a tendency to weak bones. Not getting enough calcium every day can lead to an increased risk of osteoporosis.

For more information on the connection between your heartburn medication and calcium supplements, go to www.calciumiq.com.