



# Nutrition for Older Adults:

## Diet and Health Guidelines to Lower the Risk of Medicine and Nutrient Interactions

### EXTENSION

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## How Medicines and Nutrients Interact

Some medicines can affect the way your body uses food or the nutrients in food. Some medicines can:

- Decrease food intake due to:
  - Decreased appetite.
  - Nausea.
  - Vomiting.
  - Unpleasant taste.
  - Dry mouth.
- Change nutrient absorption, metabolism, or excretion.

Nutrients in food can also affect the way your body uses some medicines. Some nutrients can:

- Change medicine absorption, metabolism, or excretion.
- Make medicines work faster, slower, or not at all.

## Medicines and Nutritional Health

There is little chance that taking a medicine for a short time will cause a nutritional problem. However, long term

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use of some medicines may affect your nutritional health.

This does not mean you need to take a vitamin or mineral supplement if you take a medicine. Most people can get the variety of nutrients they need and in the proper amounts by eating a healthy diet.

## Alcohol

A general rule is to not mix alcohol and medicines. Alcohol and medicine do not mix well. Alcohol can slow down or speed up how the body uses medicines. As a result, the action of medicines can be increased or reduced.

## Nutrient Supplements

Excess vitamin or mineral supplements can change how medicines work. In excess, vitamin and mineral supplements can act like medicine instead of a nutrient.

Nutrients in excess can:

- Compete with other nutrients for absorption, transport or metabolism.
- Have a direct overdose effect.

## Follow Directions

It is important to follow directions on how to take a medicine. Following directions can affect how or if a medicine will work properly. You also need to read all warnings on the label.

## Tips to Lower Interactions

- Eat a healthy diet following the USDA MyPlate Plan.
- Follow the directions on how to take medicines, both prescription and over the counter. Read all warning labels on medicines.
- Tell your doctor about all medicines you take including over the counter medicines and alcohol.
- Tell your doctor about any new symptoms that occur when you take a medicine.
- Do not share medicines with others or take other peoples medicines.

## Questions to Ask When You Get a New Medicine

- What is this medicine for?
- How often should I take the medicine and for how long?
- How should I store the medicine?
- Should I take the medicine with or without food?
- Does this medicine have any side effects?

## Who Is At Risk?

People at higher risk of medicine nutrient interactions are those who:

- Eat a poor diet.
- Have serious health problems.
- Take two or more medicines.
- Do not following medicine directions.
- Take medicines for a long time.
- Drink alcohol or smoke heavily.

## Sources

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