

Medication Checklist

How to protect your liver when taking prescription and over-the-counter medications, herbal remedies or other drugs

The liver is the body's clearinghouse for most drugs, herbal remedies, vitamins and supplements which means it is vulnerable to the toxic consequences of inadvertent overdoses, unexpected interactions or extended use.

The following are some tips to help safeguard your liver health and ensure that the medications and remedies you need to take achieve their desired effect:

- To avoid potentially life-threatening complications, you should talk to your doctor about all medications or supplements - pharmaceutical and herbal - that you are taking or thinking of taking.
- If your doctor prescribes a long-term medication, ask for a liver test before you start the medication and after the first few weeks of taking the drug to determine how your liver is tolerating it. Follow up with regular liver tests throughout the duration of your treatment.
- Always read and follow the dosing instructions as dictated by your doctor or the medication label. Never take more than the recommended dose and be sure to take into consideration other medications that you may be taking at the same time that may have similar ingredients.
- Never mix medication with alcohol. Alcohol increases the risk of possible liver damage. Acetaminophen can be especially toxic when combined with alcohol.
- Be careful about mixing Tylenol® with other products that contain acetaminophen. By taking more than one pain reliever or cold remedy at a time, you may accidentally take more acetaminophen than is safe. Consult your doctor about acetaminophen if you have liver disease.
- Avoid certain herbal supplements (see table below) as well as certain vitamins in high doses as they have the potential to cause damage to the liver. For example, high doses of vitamins E, K - and especially vitamins A and D - may be harmful.



Herbal Supplements that can be toxic to the liver				
Artemisia	Comfrey	Hare's ear	Ma huang	Skullcap
Atractylis gummifera	Crotalaria	Heliotropium	Mistletoe	Valerian root
Callilepis laureola	Gardenia	Jin bu huang	Plantago seed	
Chaparral leaf	Germander	Kava / Kava Kava	Red peony root	
Chrysanthemum	Greater celandine	LIV.52	Senecio	

- Avoid grapefruit, grapefruit juice or supplements with grapefruit bioflavonoids if you are taking medication. The chemicals in grapefruit (both rind and pulp) can interfere with the liver enzymes that break down drugs. A variety of different medications – including some anti-depressants, blood pressure medications, cholesterol-lowering drugs and tranquilizers – have been shown to have potentially serious interactions with grapefruit products. For more information, consult your doctor or pharmacist or visit the Health Canada website http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/grapefruit-pamplemousse_e.html
- If you have a chronic liver disease or other liver condition, consult your doctor before taking any form of prescription or non-prescription medication or herbal remedy. Liver disease compromises the liver's ability to perform its normal processing functions so you may be unable to take medications to treat other health conditions.
- Avoid the use of any form of recreational or 'street' drugs because they can put you at risk of contracting hepatitis B or C and can cause serious harm to your liver. Even a single 'experiment' could lead to a potentially life-threatening liver disease. If you do use drugs, make sure you use sterile drug-use equipment (e.g., syringes, cookers, filters, water, tourniquets, pipes, straws) and never share any of it.

The liver nurtures and protects your body and plays a critical role in maintaining overall health. For more information on liver health, please contact the Canadian Liver Foundation at 1-800-563-5483 or visit www.liver.ca