Bad Interactions

All drugs have potential side effects, but you can help reduce risks.

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Years ago, my doctor prescribed Bactrim, an antibiotic, to treat a urinary tract infection. Several hours after I took the oblong-shaped white tablets, a thick, itchy blanket of tiny bumps covered my body.

Fortunately for me, this allergic reaction didn't result in one of the nearly 7,000 deaths each year from adverse drug reactions. But this is why the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) encourages people to report any unexpected side effects from prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

Consumers can file a report online at fda.gov/safety/medwatch. Adverse drug reaction reports should include the person's name and contact information, the product's name, a description of the problem, the UPC code or other identifying codes, the store name and address, and the date the med was purchased. And there's the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System at vaers.hhs.gov for those who experience side effects after getting a vaccine.

"This may prompt an investigation and ultimately save lives," says Norman Marks, MD, MHA, the medical director of MedWatch.

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