Gender Matters

Meds can affect each of the sexes differently.

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Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) conducted driving simulation studies on people who had taken the same dosage of the insomnia drug Ambien. They found that the sexes processed the medication differently. Women had more Ambien left in their bloodstream than men after taking the med. The findings spurred researchers to take a harder look at how gender differences affect drug dosages and other aspects of health.

Says Phyllis Greenberger, of the Society for Women's Health Research, "We need a better understanding of the sex-specific mechanisms of disease as well as how women and men differ in their response to drugs and other treatments."

Greenberger is pushing for federal agencies, such as the FDA and the National Institutes of Health, to do more studies about sex differences in medicine. But what should female patients do while they wait for these agencies to move on the findings?

Some health advocacy groups suggest women do the following: Ask prescribing docs to personalize dose recommendations for them, and mention the results of the Ambien study; pay attention to their bodies, especially if they think they're reacting to a med; and report anything negative that might be drug related to their doctors, pharmacists and the FDA.

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