Safety First

Why over-the-counter drugs and HIV medicines make for a bad combination

December 4, 2017 By Kate Ferguson

Antiretroviral medications (ARVs) are a godsend to folks being treated for HIV. But these powerful meds can interact with over-the-counter (OTC) medications and possibly cause serious side effects if you don't observe some standard precautions.

Perhaps the most important safeguard against bad drug interactions is to follow this bit of advice from the experts: Always tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the meds you use. This means OTC oral antihistamines taken for seasonal allergies, inhalers, nasal sprays, meds for indigestion, herbal medicines, supplements and drugs prescribed for other chronic conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Also, divulge any recreational drugs you indulge in, such as marijuana, ecstasy or crystal meth, to your doc. Although less is known about interactions between HIV meds and street pharmaceuticals, alerting health care providers about your use of narcotics is best, say experts.

Why? Well, because being completely candid can help you avoid nasty side effects, such as toxic drug-drug interactions, neutralized positive benefits from prescription meds or harmful spikes or dips in the blood levels of either ARVs or OTC medicines.

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