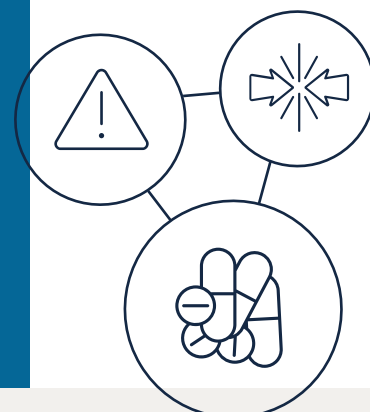


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Are you heading for a treatment clash?



Combined with HIV treatment, some drug combinations can cause serious side-effects and make one or both drugs ineffective or toxic.

Many people with HIV see more than one doctor. We get prescriptions from general practitioners (GPs) and specialists other than our HIV doctor. We also buy medications from the chemist and take complimentary therapies. Some of us also take drugs for recreation.

That is why it is important that anyone prescribing or dispensing you a medication knows about everything you are taking. This includes prescriptions from other doctors, over-the-counter medicines, herbal and alternative treatments, as well as recreational drugs.

As we age, we face health issues other than HIV. Acid reflux, erectile dysfunction and elevated cholesterol are all commonplace, as is being prescribed medication to treat them. But some of these medications do not mix well with certain HIV treatments. The same goes for some anti-infective agents and medications used to treat heart conditions, epilepsy or hepatitis C.

Statin drugs used to control cholesterol can increase to dangerous levels when combined with some HIV treatments. The same can happen to the serum levels of calcium channel blockers used to treat heart disease.

The list is long and complicated, which is why it is best to let your prescribing doctor do the research.

Some over-the-counter medicines like antihistamines, asthma inhalers or nasal sprays (which contain steroids) should not be taken with certain HIV treatments. Some common remedies for indigestion can also interact badly and should be avoided.

St John's Wort, a herb used to treat depression, should not be taken with any HIV treatment. Even garlic supplements and grapefruit juice are to be avoided if you are taking saquinavir or indinavir as they can affect the dosing level of these particular medications.

It's always a good idea to talk to your HIV doctor before adding any medicine or supplement to your regimen.

Almost every recreational drug can be affected by HIV treatment. Sometimes, the effect of the recreational drug is increased. Other interactions can cause a lessening effect prompting someone to take more of the recreational drug. Both scenarios may lead to toxicity or overdose.

If your HIV treatment contains a boosting agent—ritonavir or cobicistat—then there is an increased likelihood of an interaction.

The safest approach is to discuss your recreational drug use with your HIV doctor. They may adjust your treatment regimen or suggest ways you can manage your drug use to avoid any dangerous reactions.



For more information:

Talk to your doctor

Speak to a treatment officer at your state-based HIV organisation:

<http://napwha.org.au/networks-members/plhiv-organisations>

HIV-druginteractions.org is maintained by the University of Liverpool in the UK. The

website allows you and your doctor to check possible drug interactions. Central to the website is a comprehensive and easy-to-use Interaction Checker. <http://hiv-druginteractions.org>

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health

Medicine (ASHM) publishes antiretroviral guidelines to assist your doctors to better manage your HIV infection. The page on drug-drug interactions is worth a visit. <http://arv.ashm.org.au/arv-guidelines/drug-interactions>