

NONPRESCRIPTION MEDICINES DIGEST



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OTC Counseling: Review of Pharmacists

Jeff Taylor, Ph.D.

Millions of people every year use nonprescription medicines to treat common illnesses that do not require a physician's attention, such as colds, burns, headaches, or seasonal allergies. According to the FDA, the responsibility of choosing over-the-counter (OTC) medicines falls on consumers. Manufacturers must provide enough information on packaging and in package inserts to instruct consumers how to administer these nonprescription medicines properly.

Many consumers, however, feel more comfortable when they have secured the advice of a medical professional before taking medicines, especially for the first time. And in today's market, increasingly more medicines have gone from prescription to OTC. These factors may call for more frequent and higher-quality interaction between patients and pharmacists.

Many studies have been conducted to ascertain whether the current state of this patient-pharmacist interaction is adequate to manage the growing complexities



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of OTC drug therapy. Research indicates that pharmacists are generally respected and perceived as the most accessible health professionals. However, in many cases, patients report that pharmacists are buried far behind a counter, or that they do not spend enough time discussing treatment with them.

In tackling the new issues consumers face and the deficiencies in patient-pharmacist interaction, social skills are very important. It has been found that patients initiate almost all discussions with their pharmacists, but they report that it would be helpful to them for pharmacists to be proactive in asking questions to gather clinical information necessary to recommend treatment options.

It is crucial that pharmacists are physically accessible and willing to take enough time with each patient. While providing the vital information about side effects, contraindications, course of therapy, and how to use a product, researchers recommend taking special care to ensure the quality of communication. Looking toward the future, the onus lies on pharmacists to help patients best select and administer OTC medications.

For more information, refer to: <http://pharmacotherapy.medscape.com/41742.rhtml?srcmp=phar-081701>

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Iron Supplementation Inhibits Cough Associated With ACE Inhibitors

Lee S-L, Park SW, Kim D-K, Lee SH, Hong KP

From the Division of Cardiology, Samsung Medical Center, Sungkyunkwan University School of Medicine, Seoul, Korea.

The Role of ACE Inhibitors

ACE inhibitors are frequently prescribed to treat patients with cardiovascular conditions. They have been extremely effective in improving survival rates in patients who have suffered from hypertension and heart failure, and have also successfully reduced complications associated with those conditions.

Side Effects Dry Cough

Many patients, however, complain of side effects and adverse reactions from ACE inhibitor therapy. The most frequent is a dry cough (estimated to affect 5% - 39% of patients), which can be severe enough to cause them to discontinue therapy.

Study Design

Korean researchers, however, have published results from a randomized, double-blind study in which they tracked the dry cough associated with ACE inhibitors. Patients ranked the severity of their cough twice a day for two weeks. After this preliminary period, about half the group was given a daily iron supplement (256 mg ferrous sulfate) for four weeks; half received placebo.

Results

Lead investigator Kyung Pyo Hong, MD, reported that "supplementation of iron clearly showed beneficial effect in most of these subjects, and this effect could not be found in the placebo group." By the end of the study, 80 percent of participants who took the iron supplements showed improvement of their cough. Three out of the 10 patients reported complete resolution of their symptoms. The placebo group showed no change in the severity of the cough.

Conclusions

The authors of this study recommend that further research be conducted to verify the findings of their small sample group. However, the results are compelling enough to lead them to believe that iron supplementation can be beneficial in alleviating the dry cough associated with ACE inhibitor therapy.

For more information, refer to: *Hypertension* 2001;38(2):166-170.

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Antioxidant Supplements Reduce Benefits of Lipid-Lowering Drugs

Hong Mautz

Context Antioxidant supplements have been found to significantly reduce the beneficial effects of therapy to lower cholesterol. Niacin and simvastatin are traditionally prescribed to lower cholesterol and prevent heart disease. However, when used in a clinical study in conjunction with an antioxidant supplement cocktail including vitamins E and C, beta-carotene, and selenium, these agents hindered rather than helped the effectiveness of therapy.

Study Design Investigators studied 150 people with coronary artery disease (CAD) and low levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. All participants received niacin and simvastatin; about half also received antioxidants.

Results At the end of one year, researchers found adverse interactions between the two therapies. The group receiving only niacin and simvastatin showed

significantly higher increases in HDL2 levels, whereas the improvement in patients also taking antioxidants was less dramatic.

Conclusions Lewis Kuller, MD, DrPH, professor and chairman of the Department of Epidemiology in the School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, warns that physicians should be careful in recommending antioxidant supplements for people suffering from CAD. Rather, he suggests, people should maintain a balanced diet rich in antioxidants to prevent heart disease. This opinion is supported by the American Heart Association.

For more information, refer to: *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology*, 2001;21(8):1320-1326.

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