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## **Use Caution with Prescription and Non-Prescription Drugs**

Whether we are discussing prescription medicines or over-the-counter medicines isn't it incredible how many we have to choose from? We have medicines for every possible ache or pain as well as medicines that help us sleep, stay awake, or maintain a consciousness somewhere in between. We have medicines designed specifically for children, for women, for men, for seniors, and even for pets. We have medicines that work best in conjunction with other medicines and some that must be used alone. Even without a prescription we can walk into any drugstore and find aisles of over-the-counter medicines that can help us with virtually any health problem.

While it is certainly great to know that we have drugs to get us through many of life's difficulties it is very important for us to remember that these substances that we readily reach for should always be used with extreme caution. As much as they can help, drugs can also cause problems and some of these problems can be infinitely worse than the ailment we are trying to cure. Let's look at some statistics.

Research reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, indicates that properly researched, regulated, prescribed and used drugs are the fourth most common cause of death. A recently published paper entitled "Death by Medicine" authored by a group of researchers indicated that 2.2 million people have adverse reactions to prescription medicines each year with over 100,000 deaths resulting from these reactions.

Putting it all into perspective, since 2001 nearly 3,000 people have died in the United States as a result of terrorism while during that same time, nearly 500,000 people have died due to prescription drugs. We can double that number to nearly 1 million people when we include deaths from over-the-counter drugs.

Furthermore, in a *New England Journal of Medicine* study, an alarming one in four patients suffered observable side effects from the more than 3.34 billion prescription drugs filled in 2002. That's 835 million side effects from prescription drugs and doesn't even begin to consider the effects from over-the-counter medicines! These same researchers also estimated that over 20 million prescriptions for antibiotics each year are erroneously prescribed for patients because their ailments are viral not bacterial.

By contrast, when we look at dietary supplements, reports from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) indicate that dietary supplements have averaged less than five confirmed deaths per year over the past 25 years. Does this mean that we can be indiscriminate with supplements? Absolutely not! For the most part natural herbs and supplements are much safer than drugs but must be used carefully, especially when used in conjunction with drugs. Personal research should always be done to ensure that the company making the supplements is reputable and that

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their ingredients and formulations are reliable. It is also a good idea to discuss their use with someone trained in the use of herbs and supplements.

The purpose of this article is NOT to argue against the value of drugs for medicinal purposes but rather to remind ourselves that medicines have a purpose and that we should use extreme caution whenever we are confronted with the decision about the use of medicines. We should have a healthy respect for the potency of the drugs and use extreme care in choosing and taking them. We must remember that every drug causes multiple effects; the one effect we are trying to achieve, i.e., pain relief and the “side” effects we don’t necessarily want to endure.

We should always consider what we can do with diet, exercise, sleep, meditation, relaxation, or other truly natural and responsible things that may be just as effective and certainly safer. For instance, we quickly reach for the bottle of aspirin when we have a headache but often it is the glass of water we drink when we take the aspirin that actually relieves the headache because the headache was caused by dehydration.

So while there are times when medicines are the best response for our health challenges there are some things we can do to avoid drug dependency and maintain overall health. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Drink more water and avoid soda, coffee and other sugar or sugar-substitute laden drinks. Many problems from headaches to ulcers to constipation are caused by chronic dehydration.
2. Avoid sugar in all of its forms including baked goods (breads, muffins, doughnuts, cookies, etc.) as the “enriched” flour has no nutritional value and overtaxes our digestive systems. Instead, we should get our sugars from fresh fruits.
3. Add more whole foods to our daily diet like fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains. It is also a good plan to eat as many of these foods in their raw state as possible so we can benefit from the active enzymes.
4. We can increase our intake of good fats and reduce our intake of bad fats.
5. We can exercise in some manner every single day.