

❖ ANCILLARY STICKERS

Have you ever wondered what all the stickers mean on your medication when you pick them up from your pharmacy? Do you ignore them? Do you read them but have no idea what they mean or what to do? Some are 'self-explanatory' so I have not gone into detail about what they mean; only the ones that may need 'clarification'.

1. This medicine may cause drowsiness and may increase the effects of alcohol. If affected, do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery.

This is on any medications that cause drowsiness e.g. anti-histamines, some pain medicines and anti-depressants. You must not drink alcohol with it as it may impair your breathing and cause a serious drug interaction.

If you are pulled over by the police and you are under affected by the medication, then you can get fined. It is your responsibility as the driver to know the rules and know how a medicine will affect you before you get behind the wheel. If it is the first time taking the medication, see how it affects you for 24 hours before getting behind the wheel even if it is a short distance.

1.A This preparation is to aid sleep. Drowsiness may continue the following day. If affected, do not drive or operate machinery. Avoid alcohol.

This is on medicines prescribed for insomnia on prescription or over-the-counter. You should never combine alcohol with them as they can severely impair your breathing and cause a serious drug interaction.

They can make you feel 'cloudy' or 'groggy' the next morning, especially if it is a new medication. See how it affects you first before driving as it is your responsibility as the driver to make sure that you are not under the influence.

2. Do not take alcohol while undergoing treatment with this medicine

This is not a 'suggestion' but a warning that if you do drink alcohol with the medication that there may be a bad reaction. Either you will feel very ill with sweating, nausea, vomiting and shaking. Or the combination will cause problems with your liver and is dangerous. Either way; don't risk it!

3. Do not take dairy products, antacids, iron or calcium supplements within two hours of each dose of this medicine.

Some medicines are not absorbed very well so if you take them too close to dairy, antacids, iron or calcium supplements they won't very well or at all. Now, it does not mean a small amount of milk in your tea but larger amounts can cause a problem so you should separate them by two hours.

4. Refrigerate, do not freeze

When you store medicines in the fridge, it is best not to keep them in the door as the constant opening and closing of the door can expose the medicine to higher temperatures and possibly affect the medicine. You should not store it at the back of the fridge, as sometimes it can 'freeze' there or become too cold...again causing problems! The best place is to keep it in the middle of the top shelf where the kids can't easily reach and the temperature stays nice and constant.

5. Avoid excessive skin exposure to sunlight and sunlamps while undergoing treatment with this medicine

Certain medicines can make the skin more sensitive to the sun. Make sure you wear at least SPF 30 + broad spectrum sunscreen, a hat, sunglasses with UV protection and long-sleeved clothes wherever possible especially if you have pale skin. Especially if you are taking the medicine long-term then you will need to make these changes in your lifestyle to reduce these side-effects.

6. Do not stop taking this medicine abruptly unless otherwise advised by your doctor

This is often on steroids, blood pressure and anti-depressant medications and means that you shouldn't 'stop' taking it unless your doctor has said to do so. Usually they require you to slowly wean off them, either to reduce any 'withdrawal' symptoms or side-effects like shaking, chills, tremor or nausea that may happen.

It is also important for some health conditions, whereby if you stop your body can go into a 'shock' without it and often needs urgent medical treatment. So, if you are having side-effects and don't want to take your medicine anymore, then speak to your doctor rather than stopping it on your own. If you have run out of tablets/prescription and can't get into your doctor, then chat to your pharmacist who depending on the circumstances may be able to give you a 3 day Emergency supply of the tablets to carry you through until you see your doctor.

7. Potassium supplements should be taken only on medical advice

This does not mean that you can't eat bananas, white beans or dark green leafy vegetables whilst you're on this medicine! It means that you should have a balanced-diet and don't 'binge' eat on potassium rich foods randomly!

More so than this, it means before you take any natural health supplements check with your pharmacist as to how much potassium is in there as there may be a lot and can cause a condition called 'hyperkalaemia' which is where there is too much potassium in the body. Before your doctor prescribes any potassium supplements on prescription, make sure they know what medicines you take to prevent this from happening also.

8. This medicine may affect mental alertness and/or coordination. If affected, do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery.

Some medicines can make you feel light-headed and 'cloudy' and just like if you were drowsy, you should not drive until you have seen how you will be affected. If it is a new medicine, wait 24 hours to see its effects on you before running behind the wheel. Again, if you get pulled over and seem to be under the influence then you are responsible as the driver for what you take and can be fined.

9. Avoid drinking large quantities of grapefruit juice while being treated with this medicine

Half a grapefruit is unlikely to cause an issue, but if you were to drink a large volume of grapefruit juice it may cause an interaction. It can reduce the metabolism/break-down of certain medicines, so it will stay in your system for longer and make you more prone to the side-effects.

It is best to always have a balanced diet/life-style and not over indulge in grapefruit juice at any one time. Just a small amount here and there; but if you feel the side-effects more than usual your body may be extra sensitive in which case you should avoid it altogether or have a tiny amount!

10. Certain foods should be avoided

There is a class of anti-depressants (not very commonly prescribed at all anymore) that may have this label because certain foods can cause a severe interaction. Ask your pharmacist for a leaflet about what foods you should avoid.