



Ask Dr. Lomax

with Dr. Lenny Lomax, M.D.

Reader:

Is it okay to mix natural products with prescription medication? Recently, I ran into an old college friend. We're both 56, but she can easily pass for 45. I finally got around to asking how she does it. It's obvious she exercises, but I was really surprised to learn she uses herbal and natural products for just about everything. I'm diabetic and have high blood pressure. Someday, I hope to get off prescription medication and was wondering if it's safe to start taking natural products while I'm still on meds. I asked my doctor but he didn't know a lot about natural products and suggested I stick with my prescription medications. I respect him, but would like a second opinion.

Dr. Lomax:

As a general standard natural/herbal remedies are safe and effective if manufactured properly and taken as directed. If one is on prescription medication for some type of chronic illness it is advisable to look into whether the active ingredients in the natural remedies might interact with the prescription drugs. It is not unusual for most physicians to not be familiar with natural and herbal products or their ingredients in general because they are not required in their training to do so. Western medical training focuses on diagnoses and treatment, and treatment generally consists of prescribing medication(s), surgery, further diagnostic testing, physical therapy, observation etc. Ironically, although prescription medication can be effective in managing various conditions they generally don't cure them, and they usually have a myriad of harmful side effects, some that can be life threatening, hence the irony of physicians being concerned that natural and herbal products may interact with prescription medication. Further irony is seen in the fact the many medications are initially derived from a plant substance, then the plants active or effective ingredient is artificially synthesized in the laboratory because it's cheaper. Unfortunately the synthetic versions don't maintain the other protective characteristics of the plants, which more than likely contribute significantly to the negative side effect profiles of most drugs.

Our bodies really were not designed to take in toxic chemicals, processed foods, synthetic drugs etc. These are some of the main reasons why the United States is in a state of chronic disease. Most of these chronic diseases e.g. diabetes, hypertension, heart and kidney disease etc. are reversible and preventable. Proper nutrition and increased activity as well as limiting stress, processed food intake and other toxic chemicals e.g. from smoking, excess alcohol intake, illicit drug use etc. are of tremendous benefit. So yes, do your homework on natural products/supplements, herbal remedies etc. as they can be very beneficial in some cases more beneficial than synthetic prescription drugs which can often cause more harm than good. I, like your friend am an avid believer in and user of natural and herbal products, and I consume a daily diet that is rich in plants, fruits, lean meats and fish.

Bottom line is we are responsible for our own health so as Hippocrates once said, "Let food be your medicine, and medicine be your food" the key here is the food has to be healthy e.g. from plants and fruits, not processed foods, fast foods, toxic chemicals etc. Proper daily water intake and maintaining a healthy optimal weight are also essential. Remember to always be a seeker of information from multiple "credible" sources in order to get a better sense of what's right for you.