



## MEDICATIONS

A medication or drug is any substance that, when absorbed, inhaled or injected, changes the way your body normally functions. This includes over-the-counter drugs (OTC's) such as pain relievers, headache pills, cough, cold medicines etc. and prescription medications. Even alcohol needs to be considered. Medications are most often taken to relieve pain and discomfort and sometimes as preventative measures. However, they must be taken correctly (precise dosages, time etc) to have the desired effect. All drugs have the potential to be harmful if not properly taken. Improper drug use is a major cause for confusion, accidents, illnesses and increased hospital admissions.

If you have asthma, it is particularly important that medications you take to control other conditions be carefully reviewed by your doctor. Asthma may be made worse by certain drugs, the most common being aspirin (ASA). Others include arthritis medication, some heart medications (beta-blockers), and eye drops used to treat glaucoma. Asthmatics should **not** take beta-blockers. These drugs could cause severe airway constriction leading to life-threatening attacks. Fortunately, there are alternatives to beta-blockers.

Try to learn as much as possible about the medicines you take. Do not overlook the side effects or how the combination of two drugs might produce an undesirable effect. Develop trust in your pharmacist and try to obtain all your prescribed medications from the same pharmacy. This way your pharmacist will be able to review your medications profile for accuracy, efficacy, and safety. Do tell you doctor about ALL the medications you are taking, including OTCs and 'natural supplements.'

### **Aspirin-Induced Asthma**

Approximately 20% of people with asthma have a sensitivity to Acetylsalicylic acid (ASA), which is the active chemical found in aspirin. Asthma that is triggered by aspirin is called 'aspirin-induced asthma' or AIA. Aspirin-sensitive asthmatics who take ASA will experience nasal congestion, cough, runny nose and bronchoconstriction. Other possible symptoms include nausea, diarrhea, perspiration, flushing of face and chest, heat rash, fatigue and malaise. In rare cases, the reaction to aspirin could result in loss of consciousness and death.



ASA also occurs naturally as methylsalicylate or oil of wintergreen, which is sometimes used in over-the-counter liniments, antiseptics, sinus decongestants and cold medications. ASA can also be found in some non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs used for arthritis and many over-the-counter products; however, it may not be listed as an ingredient. Even if it is listed, it is not always called “aspirin”, which can be misleading for those who are ASA intolerant. ASA can even sometimes be found in some supplements.

**If you are ASA intolerant, avoid all products that contain ASA. When buying medication, whether prescription or over-the-counter, the aspirin sensitive person must always check the ingredients by reading the label and talking to the pharmacist. If you are aspirin sensitive, consider talking to your Allergist or Immunologist about desensitization.**

**For More Information:**

Contact the Asthma Society of Canada at 1-866-787-4050 or visit [www.Asthma.ca](http://www.Asthma.ca).