

Medicines Are Good for What Ails You, but Watch Their Effects on Vital Vitamins and Nutrients

Stanton R. Mehr

Although your prescribed medications are very important, they sometimes can have unintended effects. Using vitamin or nutrient supplements can often counter these negative effects. For example, patients with high blood pressure taking certain types of diuretics (commonly known as “water pills”) effectively drain the body of excess fluids and lower blood pressure, but they also drain the body of a necessary mineral, potassium, which is needed for proper muscle function. Patients are usually given a “potassium-sparing” diuretic or potassium supplements to compensate for this loss.

Antibiotic drugs may rid the body of infecting bacteria, but they may also kill “good” bacteria, which occur naturally in the intestines and help digest food. Without these needed bacteria, symptoms like bloating, nausea, and diarrhea or constipation can occur. By taking *Lactobacillus acidophilus* supplements or eating yogurt that contains this bacteria two hours after you take antibiotics, you can help avoid these effects.

One of the most commonly prescribed drugs for managing diabetes, metformin, has been linked to vitamin B12 deficiency. The greater the dose of metformin, the more likely vitamin B12 deficiency is to occur. Patients taking this product may benefit from the use of vitamin B12 supplementation.

Ask your pharmacist if the medication you are taking has a negative effect on your body’s needed vitamins and nutrients. You may benefit from taking a vitamin supplement with your prescribed medication.

Ting RZ, Szeto CC, Chan MH, Ma KK, Chow KM. Risk factors of vitamin B(12) deficiency in patients receiving metformin. *Arch Intern Med.* 2006 Oct 9;166(18):1975-9.