

GRAPEFRUIT JUICE AND LIPITOR

Food can be powerful medicine. In fact, certain medical systems like Traditional Chinese Medicine (from China) and Ayurvedic Medicine (from India) regards food as very important medicine in an individual's health picture. Many prescription drugs that are common today interact with certain foods – either favorably or negatively – and therefore, when a person receives a prescription from their physician, recommendations are given that includes food considerations. Physicians and pharmacists will often advise about taking a prescription either with a meal, before a meal or even avoiding certain foods when taking a dose will be given.

Grapefruit juice is an interesting example of a food item that can interact with several drugs. Grapefruit juice does interact with a number of drugs' functioning by generally increasing the bioavailability or absorption of certain drugs in the intestine leading to dosage and timing problems. This leads to increased amounts of the drug in the blood stream and increased action or effects of the drug. Therefore, grapefruit juice is problematic with *certain* antidepressants and heart medications since it disrupts certain functions of intestinal enzymes, and can raise blood levels of these drugs to potentially toxic levels.

Because some, but not all, medications related to heart disease may have such adverse interactions, there is accompanying advice to not take the medication *with grapefruit juice*. Remember, however, not all medications are the same and for example, the numerous cholesterol-lowering medications – while they all work to lower blood cholesterol – can be very different, acting on many different levels and even different organs in the body in helping to reduce cholesterol.

Most drugs are absorbed in the small intestine by a process of simple diffusion, and the presence of other drugs or components may affect absorption by speeding up or interfering with normal absorption. Drugs have the potential to be absorbed, broken down, or excreted as they pass from the intestine into the blood stream. It is true that several commonly-prescribed medications – including other cholesterol-lowering medications (but not Lipitor) – may interact with grapefruit juice. Some of the more common drugs that have negative interactions with grapefruit juice include: propranolol, metoprolol, labetalol, verapamil, hydralazine, felodipine, chlorpromazine, amitriptyline, imipramine and morphine, to name a few.

It is good to always ask about food and drug interactions and the best advice can come from your health care professional who knows an individual's complete medical history. All-too-often, a well-intentioned friend who may also be on a cholesterol-lowering medication – albeit completely different from your own – will offer advice that may not apply to your situation.

While it is true that grapefruit juice is advised against for individuals taking several kinds of drugs, Lipitor (a cholesterol-lowering drug), for example, is not one of them. However, if a health care provider makes a recommendation to not consume grapefruit juice along with a drug that may not typically be known to interact negatively, he or she probably has good reason to do so based on other factors regarding each individual's unique health status and other drugs or supplements the patient may be taking.

Lipitor (atorvastatin) falls into category of lipid-lowering drugs and is a "statin" drug that helps reduce cholesterol by interrupting the synthesis of cholesterol in the body. Because certain amount of cholesterol are necessary in the body for healthy functioning, cholesterol comes not only from the food we eat, but we are able to make it internally as well. This is where Lipitor functions – in interrupting over-synthesis of cholesterol in the body. The result from decreased synthesis, therefore, is a lowering of total and LDL "bad" cholesterol. Lipitor is generally prescribed to be used in conjunction with diet and exercise, which are lifestyle factors that positively affect cholesterol levels.

Potential interactions with Lipitor include antacids, antifungal medications, cyclosporine, erythromycin, digoxin, oral contraceptives, and alcohol, among others. Lipitor may also potentially lead to unfavorable interactions with supplements of Coenzyme Q10, Vitamin A, Magnesium-containing antacids and Niacin. No adverse interactions have been noted between Lipitor and grapefruit juice, however, in the pharmacology texts. Check with your prescribing physician if you are on other medications and follow his or her advice.

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Because some *other* medications related to heart disease – that act very differently to the drug you mention – may have such adverse interactions, there is accompanying advice to not take the medication *with grapefruit juice*. Remember, however, not all medications are the same and even other cholesterol-lowering medications can be very different, acting on many different levels and even different organs in the body in helping to reduce cholesterol.

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cholesterol-lowering medications (but not Lipitor) – may interact with grapefruit juice (some include: propranolol, metoprolol, labetalol, verapamil, hydralazine, felodipine, chlorpromazine, amitriptyline, imipramine and morphine, to name a few).

The general recommendation for Lipitor is to take it at the same time each day with or without food, but your physician may have specialized advice for you. If you are taking other medications, he or she may have given you advice on what to avoid when taking the prescription to maximize its effect and minimize potential interactions or side effects. It is good you are asking this question and your best advice can come from your health care professional who knows your complete medical history. All-too-often, a well-intentioned friend who may also be on a cholesterol-lowering medication – albeit completely different from your own – will offer advice that may not apply to your situation.

Every drug acts differently and is prescribed based on a patient's unique circumstances. For this reason, an individual should never take another person's medications. Many people confuse one cholesterol-lowering medications as the "same" as all the rest, but this is not the case. Rely on your physician and pharmacist to give you the best information on this subject.

We have answered your question in general terms, but due to the nature of the condition you are describing, it is not within the scope of this educational service to answer your question in more detail or give specific treatment-oriented advice. Please consult with your medical doctor who is able to evaluate your health status and answer your questions.

References:

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