

Louisiana Pharmacists Association Educates Patients About Medications That May Cause Photosensitive Reactions

With the summer heat starting to give way to cool autumn breezes, we may find ourselves outside a bit more, therefore, it's important for everyone to know that there are medications that could cause skin reactions when the skin is exposed to the sun. The main type of skin reactions that can occur when on certain medications and exposed to the sun is Photosensitivity. Photosensitivity is when your skin is abnormally sensitive to sunlight. This type of reaction may appear as red skin that resembles a mild sunburn. When taking any medication that may cause photosensitivity, it is important to wear sunblock when going outside, even for a short amount of time. If you believe you are experiencing any of these symptoms talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Photosensitivity can then be broken down into two subcategories, Photoallergy and Phototoxicity.

Phototoxicity is the most common form of a photosensitive reaction. Although it has the word toxicity in the name, it is not as bad as it sounds. This reaction is the one caused mainly by sunlight. This type of reaction can occur within minutes to hours upon taking the medication and being in contact with sunlight. This reaction is mainly seen in the areas where the skin was exposed to sunlight. Once the drug is discontinued and the drug is no longer in the body, the reaction will go away. Symptoms that may be experienced are burning followed by redness of the skin.

Photoallergic reactions are much less common than phototoxic ones. With this reaction, the body's immune system elicits an immune response like in an allergic reaction and can cause inflammation in areas that are exposed to the sun. The skin reaction may also be seen on areas of the body that were never exposed to the sun due to it being immune-mediated. This reaction, however, may occur for some time even after the drug is discontinued. Common symptoms associated with these reactions are itching, inflammation, and redness that may take a few days to appear.

There are a few different classes of medications that can cause these types of reactions. Although there are many different medications that can cause a reaction, the risk of developing one is relatively small. Some examples of medications that can cause photosensitive reactions are as follows.

Ciprofloxacin (Cipro), levofloxacin (Levaquin), doxycycline (Vibramycin), sulfamethoxazole and trimethoprim (Bactrim, Bactrim DS), diphenhydramine (Benadryl), amiodarone (Cordarone), nifedipine (Procardia), diltiazem (Cardizem), atorvastatin (Lipitor), pravastatin (Pravachol), simvastatin (Zocor), rosuvastatin (Crestor), furosemide (Lasix), glyburide (Glycron), naproxen (Aleve), and ibuprofen (Advil).

Of all of the medications listed, the two medications that have the highest risk for developing a photosensitive skin reaction is Bactrim and Lasix. If you ever have any questions as to whether your medications may cause this side effect, be sure to ask your pharmacist or doctor. While the risk is low for many medications, it is important to know any potential risks to take appropriate precautions. If you believe that you are experiencing any type of photosensitive reaction be sure to contact your doctor for further instructions in regard to taking your medication.

References:

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Author:

NaTasha Russell, PharmD Candidate 2020

University of Louisiana at Monroe College of Pharmacy