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SIDE EFFECTS OF MEDICINES

Sohiba Turdikulovna Tursunkulova
Lecturer, Department of Pharmacy Ishtikhan Abu Ali ibn Sino
Public Health Technical School Uzbekistan
Munisa Hoshimjonovna Shaydullaeva
Lecturer, Department of PharmacyIshtikhan Abu Ali ibn Sino
Public Health Technical School Uzbekistan

Annotation: Medicines play an essential role in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases. However, in addition to their therapeutic benefits, medicines may cause unwanted or harmful effects known as side effects or adverse drug reactions. These reactions can range from mild symptoms, such as nausea and headache, to serious conditions that require immediate medical attention. This article examines the main types of medication side effects, their causes, risk factors, and preventive measures. It also emphasizes the importance of rational medicine use, patient education, and pharmacovigilance in improving medication safety.

Keywords: medicines, side effects, adverse drug reactions, medication safety, drug interactions, pharmacovigilance, patient health, rational drug use.

Medicines are among the most important tools in modern healthcare. They help prevent diseases, relieve symptoms, control chronic conditions, and improve patients' quality of life. Nevertheless, no medicine is completely free from risk. Even when a medicine is used correctly, it may produce unwanted effects in some individuals.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), side effects may vary from relatively minor problems to life-threatening reactions. Their occurrence depends on several factors, including the type of medicine, dosage, age, existing medical conditions, and the use of other medicines or dietary supplements [1].

Understanding the side effects of medicines is important for healthcare professionals, pharmacists, patients, and caregivers. Appropriate knowledge helps people recognize potential warning signs, use medicines correctly, and seek medical assistance when necessary.

The purpose of this article is to describe common and serious side effects of medicines, explain the factors contributing to their occurrence, and discuss practical strategies for reducing medication-related risks.

Definition and Types of Medication Side Effects

A side effect is an unwanted effect that occurs in addition to the intended therapeutic effect of a medicine. The term *adverse drug reaction* is commonly used for a harmful and unintended response associated with the use of a medicine at normal doses.

Medication-related problems can be classified into several categories.

Common and Mild Side Effects

Many medicines may cause temporary or relatively mild symptoms. These include:

- Nausea and vomiting.
- Headache.
- Dizziness.
- Dry mouth.
- Drowsiness or fatigue.
- Diarrhea or constipation.

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- Mild skin irritation.

The likelihood and severity of these effects vary between medicines and individuals. Some symptoms may improve as the body adjusts to treatment, while others may require medical advice or a change in therapy [2].

Serious Adverse Reactions

Some medication reactions can cause significant harm and require urgent medical assessment. Examples include severe bleeding, serious liver injury, dangerous changes in heart rhythm, and severe allergic reactions.

A particularly dangerous reaction is anaphylaxis, which may develop rapidly and affect breathing and circulation. Warning signs include swelling of the tongue or throat, difficulty breathing, faintness, and collapse. These symptoms require emergency medical assistance [3].

Allergic Reactions

Drug allergies occur when the immune system reacts abnormally to a medicine. Symptoms may include itching, hives, skin rash, and swelling of the face or lips. Severe allergic reactions may lead to breathing difficulties and a sudden fall in blood pressure.

It is important to distinguish an allergic reaction from an ordinary side effect. For example, nausea alone does not necessarily indicate a drug allergy. Correct identification is important because an inaccurate allergy label may affect future treatment decisions [4].

Main Causes of Medication Side Effects

Medication side effects can occur for several reasons.

Dosage-related effects. Some medicines produce stronger unwanted effects when taken at higher doses. Taking more than the prescribed amount can increase the risk of toxicity.

Individual differences. People differ in how they absorb, distribute, metabolize, and eliminate medicines. Age, genetics, liver function, and kidney function may influence the body's response.

Drug interactions. Taking two or more medicines together can change their effects. Some combinations increase the risk of adverse reactions, while others reduce the effectiveness of treatment.

Interactions with food and supplements. Certain foods, alcoholic beverages, herbal products, and dietary supplements can affect how medicines work.

Existing health conditions. A medicine that is appropriate for one person may be unsuitable for another because of conditions such as kidney disease, liver disease, or cardiovascular disorders.

Incorrect use of medicines. Taking a medicine at the wrong time, using an incorrect dose, confusing medicines, or failing to follow professional instructions can increase the risk of harm.

The FDA recommends that patients discuss their medicines, supplements, medical conditions, and potential interactions with healthcare professionals before beginning treatment [1].

Examples of Side Effects Associated with Different Medicines

Different groups of medicines may produce different types of adverse effects. The examples below are general and do not mean that every person taking these medicines will experience the listed symptoms.

Medicine group	Possible side effects
Antibiotics	Nausea, diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, allergic reactions
Antihistamines	Drowsiness, dry mouth, dizziness, depending on the medicine
Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)	Stomach irritation, ulcers, gastrointestinal bleeding, kidney problems
Antihypertensive medicines	Dizziness, low blood pressure, fatigue, depending on the drug

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Some diabetes medicines	Low blood glucose, gastrointestinal symptoms, or other drug-specific effects
Antidepressants	Nausea, sleep disturbances, dizziness, or changes in appetite, depending on the medicine

Patients should consult the official patient information leaflet for the specific medicine they use. The nature and likelihood of adverse effects differ considerably among individual medicines within the same group [2].

Risk Factors for Adverse Drug Reactions

Although anyone can experience a medication side effect, some people may face increased risks.

Older adults may be more vulnerable because of age-related changes in kidney and liver function and the use of multiple medicines. Children require particular attention because medicine doses often depend on age, weight, and the specific formulation.

People with chronic illnesses may also require careful medication selection and monitoring. In addition, taking several prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, or supplements simultaneously increases the possibility of interactions.

Pregnant and breastfeeding individuals should seek professional advice before using medicines because certain substances may affect the fetus or infant.

These factors demonstrate why medication decisions should be individualized rather than based solely on general recommendations.

Conclusion

Medication side effects are an important aspect of healthcare and patient safety. Although medicines provide substantial therapeutic benefits, they may also cause unwanted reactions ranging from mild discomfort to serious and potentially life-threatening conditions.

The occurrence of side effects depends on the medicine itself, dosage, individual characteristics, existing health conditions, and interactions with other substances. Therefore, safe medication use requires appropriate prescribing, clear patient information, professional monitoring, and timely recognition of warning signs.

Pharmacovigilance plays a central role in identifying and preventing medicine-related harm. Cooperation between patients, pharmacists, doctors, and regulatory authorities can improve the safe use of medicines and contribute to better health outcomes.

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