



## Summer and Your Medications

By Lynn Harrelson, R.Ph., FASCP  
Senior Pharmacy Solutions  
Medication Therapy Management Services  
[www.SeniorPharmacySolutions.com](http://www.SeniorPharmacySolutions.com)

We have all heard the song, "hot summer time and the living is easy". And during these months, most of us generally take things a little easier. There are several things, however, about which we should be more serious...our medications, the sun, the heat, and staying healthy.

One of the biggest problems seen during the summer months is dehydration, a lack of fluids to properly maintain body functions. Sufficient fluids are needed to keep the kidneys and the cardiovascular system in proper function and to assure more regular bowel and bladder habits. During the warmer months, we lose much more of our body's fluids by evaporation. The results of "water pills" or diuretics can be more profound during the summer months. In addition, many people limit the fluid intake in an attempt to manage bathroom visits.

Dehydration or lack of fluids can lead to lightheadedness. When we do not drink adequate fluids, gravity will cause the smaller volume of blood to localize in the lower parts of our body. Some people will experience what they describe as a racing heart, which may be caused by the heart pumping against a smaller volume of fluid.

Constipation normally caused by not consuming enough fluids may be worsened during the summer months and even more so when certain medications are used.

Every one of all ages is encouraged to consume more fluids during the summer months. Should you experience lightheadedness or rapid heart beats, consider these conditions serious and report how you feel to your healthcare provider. Always be sure to report to them about how much fluid you consume daily when you experience these conditions and if these conditions improve when you consume additional fluid.

Some individuals may experience an allergic reaction when taking medications by mouth or by injection and others experience allergic reactions when using a topical medication. Allergies may be caused by many things and the public

seldom thinks about the allergic type reactions that sunlight may cause when we use some medications. This is called medication-induced photosensitivity. During the summer months, everyone should be more mindful of this possible reaction, especially when new medications are started.

There are two groups of medication-induced photosensitivity. Various agents, including drugs, perfume, cosmetics, and even the sunscreen that is meant to protect your skin can cause photoallergic reactions. These reactions are the result of a medication or other chemical applied to the skin causing a contact inflammation of the skin. About 1% of the population may show signs of this type of photosensitivity. These reactions can be minor in the beginning but worsen over time with continued use. These skin reactions may occur to areas not exposed to the sun which may cause you not to think of the items used on your skin as the reason for the reaction. Two medications widely known for this type of reaction are topical tetracycline and some sulfur based products. Some sunscreens will also cause these problems with time.

The more common phototoxicity includes the sunburn, redness or other reactions caused by any chemical, not just medications. This reaction can happen at any time, even with the first use of a medication. This reaction is often immediate, usually within 24 hours after starting a medication or using a chemical and being exposed to the sun. Phototoxic symptoms may include severe redness on the areas of the skin exposed to light. This reaction begins with redness and swelling and results in the reddened skin peeling off. Phototoxic reactions are often described as an exaggerated sunburn with severe tenderness.

For this reason, during the sunny months, it is extremely important to ask your healthcare provider about being out in the sun when starting a new medication. A vast array of medications may cause this response; a few well-known examples are amiodarone, sulfur compounds and tetracyclines, thiazide diuretics, and some antidiabetic agents.

Each of us reacts differently to the sun and to the medications and other chemicals that can cause these reactions. Reactions are often dependent on the dose of medication used and how long it has been used. In addition, the frequency, length and intensity of sun exposure can alter how you react.

Preventing reactions that are caused by the use of certain medications is the same as preventing sunburn; susceptible patients should avoid prolonged sun

exposure. Your risk of photosensitivity is dependent on the medication and dose used and your skin damage potential. (Individuals with fair skin and freckles many have more problems). Good prevention includes discussing the need to avoid exposure to the sun, wear protective clothing (including hats), and use of sunscreen products. Tanning beds should be avoided when using medications that cause photosensitivity. Always take extra precaution when new medications are started and when you expect to be in the sun.

Another caution to heed during the summer months is that some medications alter the body's response to heat and humidity. Such drugs as haloperidol, thioridazine and several others may cause you not to sweat. The release of heat is suppressed and individuals can overheat. Use extra care to prevent becoming overheated from sun exposure, exercise or hot weather. While taking these medications, overheating may result in heat stroke. Wear cool clothes and keep a cool non-alcoholic beverage handy while taking these meds during the warmer weather.

Enjoy the sunny months, just know the medications and other chemicals that you use, know what you might need to watch for and take the precaution to make your sunny months more fun.