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— AMERICAN BOARD OF PLASTIC SURGERY —

MEDICATIONS AND PLASTIC SURGERY

Prior to surgery, plastic surgeons inquire about health histories and may advise patients to temporarily discontinue certain prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, as well as certain vitamins. Among them are aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications (eg: ibuprofen), and Vitamin E, which can cause excessive bleeding. Medications categorized as monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors (eg: the antidepressants Nardil or Parnate) are contraindicated because of their interaction with certain narcotics. If given with the frequently-used pain medication Demerol (meperidine), seizures, coma and death may occur; if given with substances such as dopamine or epinephrine, a hypertensive crisis may result.

When patients do not disclose their use of herbal or other dietary supplements along with the other medications they are taking, because they believe these supplements “don’t count”, unexpected drug interactions may occur. For example, St John’s Wort, an herb with purported effects on mood and sleep disorders, may behave like an MAO inhibitor. Ginko biloba, which comes from the Chinese maidenhair tree and is commonly claimed to enhance memory, has been believed to compound the effect of the anesthesia being administered, and Echinacea, used to stimulate the immune system, has been reported to cause liver damage and blood pressure abnormalities when used with general anesthesia. Dietary supplements do count!

Some plastic surgeons advocate the use of Arnica (from the flower Arnica Montana) and Bromelain (an enzyme found in pineapples) to decrease post-operative bruising and swelling. These supplements may be prescribed for the day of surgery and several days after. However, there is no consensus on the benefits of such treatment, and these supplements should be taken only under the guidance of one’s surgeon.

Patients are advised against self-medicating in general and should disclose to their surgeon any substance they are taking. These include vitamins, minerals, herbal or other dietary supplements, as well as prescription and nonprescription medications. In most cases, the potentially harmful substance should be discontinued 1 to 2 weeks before and after surgery to prevent complications.

Dietary supplements should be taken with caution and only after being fully researched. Potential health benefits may not outweigh the risks, and a physician’s advice should be obtained before taking supplements.

*The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) is an organization devoted to education and research in aesthetic (cosmetic) plastic surgery. Its members are plastic surgeons certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery.