



# OUT BEHIND THE BARN DANS LE FEU DE L'ACTION

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## CMA Web site – Drug information

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**A**re you tired of squinting at the small print in the *Compendium of Pharmaceuticals and Specialties (CPS)*, or of not being able to find information on a newly released drug? If so, visit the Canadian Medical Association Web site, which includes an up-to-date drug database, a drug interaction analyzer and information about “herbal” or “natural” products. An individual subscription to this information would cost US\$350, but it is available free to CMA members.

### **CONTENT**

The database is compiled by Lexi-Comp ([www.lexi.com](http://www.lexi.com)) and is updated regularly. For example, a search for Vioxx (rofecoxib) showed a “special alert” about the drug being recently taken off the market because of cardiovascular complications. Lexi-Comp is a US company, but the database includes monographs on drugs that are only available in Canada. The Canadian trade names are listed for most products, a feature that is often weak in other drug databases.

### **REGISTRATION**

To register to use this and other “members only” resources, visit the CMA Web site ([cma.ca](http://cma.ca)) and click on the “Register Now” icon. When you register, you will be given a user name and password to access the Web site.

### **DRUG INFORMATION PAGE**

Go to the CMA Web site and then click on the “Drug Information” icon. This page provides a list of available resources, a search window, and links to recent drug advisories from Health

Canada and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Help for a new user is limited to 2 short “tips” pages.

### **SEARCH WINDOW**

Enter a search term in the “Search For” window. The default is to search the “Name” field. You can change this by selecting an option from the “Within” drop-down menu. The default database is “Lexi-Drugs Online” but this can be changed in the drop-down menu labelled “In.” To initiate the search, click on the “Go” icon. The database is large, so even with a high-speed Internet connection, the results may take a few seconds to display.

### **DRUG NAMES**

The description of a drug includes the generic name and both Canadian and US brand names. A separate section lists “International Brand Names,” which is useful when treating a patient from outside North America.

### **CLINICAL INFORMATION**

The database includes sections about dosage, contraindications, drug interactions, adverse reactions, and effects on pregnancy and lactation. Hyperlinks let you jump quickly to any desired subsection. There are also pictures of many products, and a colour-coded index of drugs, available from the “Drug ID” link on the main Drug Information page.

### **DRUG INTERACTIONS**

Major interactions are listed in the drug description, including any effects on the Cytochrome P450 system. There is a link in each drug description to the interaction analyzer (described later).

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### **PATIENT INFORMATION**

Many drug descriptions include a “Lexi-Pals” link to a patient-oriented handout. To save time, consider printing or downloading copies of the handouts for any medications that you use regularly.

### **LEXI-DRUGS ONLINE**

By clicking on the “Lexi-Drugs Online” link on the main Drug Information page, you can search by the first letter of a drug’s generic name. This index displays the date when the information was last updated. There is an option to list any products whose descriptions have changed in the past 7 or 30 days.

### **DRUG INTERACTION ANALYZER**

Click on “Drug Interact” on the main Drug Information page. From this “interaction” page you can search for drug–drug, drug–herb and herb–herb interactions. To demonstrate, let’s assume that a patient is taking warfarin. During a later visit, you learn that this patient is also taking aspirin and 2 herbal therapies, ginkgo and ginseng.

### **WARFARIN SEARCH**

Type “warfarin” in the “Search For” window, and then click on the “Go” icon. (This is different from the “Enter Key Words” search window located at the top of all CMA pages.) The page will be redrawn, and warfarin appears as the first entry in a drug list below the search window. A list of drugs interacting with warfarin will be displayed, including a “risk rating” code:

- A. No known interaction
- B. No action needed
- C. Monitor therapy
- D. Consider therapy modification
- X. Avoid combination.

### **ASPIRIN SEARCH**

Next, add aspirin to your search list by typing it in the “Search For” window. This time the program will prompt you to distinguish between “aspirin” and “acetaminophen.” Click on “aspirin” in the option list to add it to the analysis list. If necessary, you can remove an individual drug from the analysis list by clicking on “Remove,” or remove all drugs by clicking on “Clear Items”.

### **HERBAL SEARCHES**

Now, type “ginkgo” then “ginseng” as separate entries in the search window. For ginseng, the program will display 3 types (American, Panax and Siberian). We’ll assume that your patient does not know which type he or she is taking, so select all 3.

### **INTERACTION ANALYSIS**

After entering all the medications, click the “Analyze” icon. The program will list each medication and any interaction with the other 5 medications. To see a description of the interaction for each pair of drugs, click on the highlighted link.

### **INTERACTION DESCRIPTIONS**

Each description begins with a brief summary, including an assessment of the reliability of the information. This is followed by more detail, including suggestions for management and a list of references. A useful addition to this information would be to provide a direct PubMed link for each listed reference.

### **LEXI-DRUGS FOR PDAS**

Lexi-Drugs, Lexi-Interact and other Lexi-Comp databases are also available for use on PDAs (personal digital assistants) of either the Palm OS or Pocket PC type. The database can be stored on memory cards.

**Competing interests:** None declared.