



Using Your Medicines Wisely

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Medicines play a very important role in the health of seniors in the United States. They help prevent illness and disability and improve the quality of life, so that people of all ages can participate in the activities they enjoy most. However, if not properly taken and regularly checked, medicines can also cause harm. Among seniors, the risks of medication-related problems are especially significant due to the large number of medicines they often take and the aging body's slowed absorption rate.

Here are some tips on safe prescription medicine use:

- Take your medicine in the exact amount and at the times your doctor prescribes.
- Keep and take your meds in a safe, dry, well-lit place.
- Do not skip doses, take half doses, or take anyone else's pills to save money.
- Read medicine labels and package inserts and follow the directions.
- Ask questions of the doctor or pharmacist if you are in doubt.
- Make and keep an up-to-date listing of all your medications and dosage.
- Use a calendar or special pillbox to help you remember what to take and when to take it.
- Once a year, go through the medicine cabinet to get rid of old, expired items.

In addition to prescription drugs, people take drugs purchasable without a prescription. Vitamins, supplements, pain relievers, and cold or stomach ache relief pills sold without a pharmacist's input are called OTC (over-the-counter) medicines. Because mixing

certain OTCs and certain medicines can cause problems, the doctor should know about all the medications his patients are taking - including OTCs. Remember, medicines that are strong enough to cure you can also be strong enough to hurt you. They also can interact with other drugs, alcohol, or food.

Here are some possible signs of a medication related problem:

- Loss of coordination leading to walking unsteadily or frequently falling
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Unexplained bruises or chronic pain
- Memory trouble after having a drink or taking medicine
- Irritability, sadness, depression
- Dizziness or faintness
- Confusion or trouble concentrating
- Loss of interest in activities

If you experience any of the above, be sure to speak to your healthcare professional as soon as possible. He or she may need to change your medications. The most important thing you can do is to embrace your personal "Healthcare Team." This includes all the people involved in keeping you healthy: your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists or mental health professionals. It also includes the person who might go with you to the doctor as well as a trusted friend or relative from whom you seek advice. Together, you can make sure your medications optimize your health.



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