

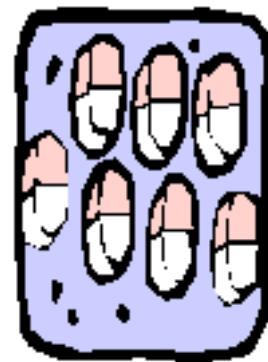
Medicine and Older Adults

You are a partner in your health care. It is a partnership that includes you, your doctor and your pharmacist. You need to speak up and learn about the medicines you take. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is working to make drugs safer for older adults, who consume a large share of the nation's medications. Adults over age 65 buy 30 percent of all prescription drugs and 40 percent of all over-the-counter drugs. Almost every drug that comes through FDA for approval has been examined for effects in the elderly, meaning people more than 65. If the manufacturer has not done a study that includes the elderly, the FDA usually asks for it. This brochure will tell you what older adults need to know about the medicines they take.



Be More Careful With Medicine

Of all the problems older adults face in taking medication, drug interactions are probably the most dangerous. When two or more drugs are mixed in the body, they may interact with each other and produce dangerous side effects. Getting too much of one medicine, called a drug overdose can cause side effects also. This is especially a problem for seniors because they are much more likely to take more than one drug. The average older person is taking more than four prescription medicines at once plus two over-the-counter-drugs. It is not always bad to take drugs in combination. High blood pressure is often treated with several different drugs. Many seniors have multiple cardiovascular risk factors - high blood pressure, diabetes, abnormal cholesterol - and may need many drugs to treat them.



Older adults tend to be more sensitive to drugs than younger adults are, due to

their generally slower metabolisms and organ functions. As people age, many lose muscle tissue and gain fat tissue and their digestive system, liver and kidney functions slow down. All this affects how a drug will be absorbed into the bloodstream, how it will react in the organs and how quickly it will be eliminated. The old saying, “start low and go slow” applies, especially to the elderly.

Older adults who experience dizziness, constipation, upset stomach, sleep changes, diarrhea, incontinence, blurred vision, mood changes, a rash or other symptoms after taking a drug should call their doctor.



How to Prevent Drug Side Effects

- » Take a drug only if you really need it. Ask your doctor if there is another way to treat a problem before taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs.
- » Tell your doctor about ALL the DRUGS, VITAMINS, HERBS and other PILLS you take. Make sure to include both prescription drugs (ones you get from the pharmacist with a doctor’s prescription) and over-the-counter drugs (ones you buy yourself without a prescription). If you have several doctors, make sure they all know what the others are prescribing.
- » Ask your doctor to review all your medicines. Put all your medicines in a bag. Take them to your next doctor’s appointment. This is the best way to let your doctor know what medicines, vitamins and other pills you are taking.
- » If you need drugs to treat more than one condition, ask your doctor if there is one drug that can treat both. For example, some blood pressure medicines also treat migraine headaches.
- » If you have side effects, write them down. Write down when they

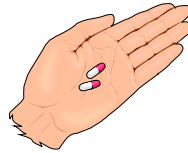
happened. Also, write down any new problems you have, even if you think they are not related to the drug. Tell your doctor about these side effects. Ask the doctor if there is another drug that may be better for you to take.

- » Learn about the drugs you are taking. Ask the druggist and doctor questions. Read the information that comes with the medicine or ask a family member or friend to read it for you.
- » Follow directions. Read the label. Understand when you should take the medicine and how much you should take.
- » Always take your medicine when you should.

Not all older adults are in danger of drug interactions and drug overdoses. In fact, as more and more people live active lives well into their 90's and beyond, many take few medicines at all. Among healthy seniors, medicines may have the same physical effects as they do in younger adults. It is primarily when disease interferes that the problems begin. To guard against potential problems with drugs, however, older adults should know about what they take and how it makes them feel. They should not hesitate to talk to their doctors or pharmacists about questions and problems they have with a medication.



Easy Ways to Take Medicine



Many older adults cannot use their hands well, or forget things easily. Here are some ways to make it easy for you to take medicines:

- » Ask the druggist to put your medicines in BIG bottles that are easy to open.
- » Ask for bottles with labels printed in LARGE letters or use a magnifying glass and read the label under bright light.
- » Use a memory aid to help you to remember to take your medicine. For examples, a calendar, a chart, at mealtime or before you go to bed. You can also put all the drugs you need to take for one day or one week in a small container, like a pillbox. You can buy pillboxes at drugstores. One lady turns each medicine bottle upside down after taking the pill so she can tell if she has taken it that day.
- » If you forget easily, you also might want to ask a family member to remind you when and how much medicine you need to take.



How to Cut Medicine Cost



The cost of medication is a serious concern for older adults. Many pay for drugs out of pocket. Even those who have insurance to supplement Medicare often pay a percentage of the cost of medicine.

TIPS:

- » When trying a drug for the first time, ask for just a few pills. That way, you can see if you have problems with the medicine before paying for a whole bottle.
- » For medicine that you take all the time, buy larger amounts at a time so that the price for each pill is cheaper. However, before you do this, make sure you will be able to use all the medicine within at least a year. Holding on to medicines for a long time may cause the drug to lose its ability to work.
- » Call around to see which store has the lowest price.
- » Ask for a senior citizen discount.
- » Ask your doctor if it is OK to take a generic drug.
- » Ask your doctor if he or she has free drug samples. This is especially convenient for trying out a new prescription.
- » Buy store-brand or discount brand over-the-counter products. Ask the druggist for recommendations.



Questions to Ask Your Doctor or Pharmacist



- » What is the name of the drug? Is this the brand name or a copy of the brand name drug? Copies of brand name drugs are called “generic drugs.” They usually cost less than brand name drugs, but they work the same.

- » If the prescription is written for a brand name, is it OK for the pharmacist to give me the generic version of this drug?
- » What does the drug do?
- » Does it matter if I take it with food?
- » Are there foods I should stop eating while I am on this drug?
- » Is it safe to drink alcohol, such as beer or wine, while I am on this drug?
- » How long will I need to take this drug?
- » What should I do if I forget to take the medicine?
- » What are the common side effects?
- » How will I know if this drug is working?
- » Where should I keep this drug?



If you have a question about medicines, you can contact the FDA toll-free at 1.888.463.6332 or on the World Wide Web at www.fda.gov.