



Caregiver Corner: How to Prevent Medication Interactions

Caregiving for an older adult involves many responsibilities. One of the most challenging caregiving tasks can be supervising prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications.

You may be responsible for picking up prescription and OTC medications from the pharmacy, organizing them, and administering them -or assisting the person in your care to take them as prescribed or recommended.

It's likely that the older person in your care has more than one condition requiring a prescription medication and frequent interaction with a health care professional. As we age, long-term and chronic conditions become more common. Heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, reflux, and arthritis are common age-related conditions. Often, these conditions require management by more than one health care professional.

You may know that it's important to be aware of medication interactions when someone takes multiple medications. But did you know that alcohol interacts with more than 150 medications, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism?

Increased Sensitivity and Decreased Tolerance to Medication and Alcohol

Not only are older adults more sensitive to the effects of alcohol and medications, many prescription medications may interact with alcohol to cause potentially dangerous adverse effects.

Prescription medications may not work as intended when combined with alcohol, or may not work at all. Or, they may become harmful—even toxic. And, alcohol may make health conditions worse.

continued on page 2

Caregiver Corner: How to Prevent Medication Interactions, *continued*

Read the Label and Heed It

These common prescription medications often display a label warning not drink alcohol while taking them. Is the medication for the person you care for on this list?

- Anxiety or depression medication
- Sedatives or sleep aids
- High blood pressure medication
- Allergy medication
- Diabetes medication
- Pain relievers
- Antibiotics
- Blood thinners
- Heart medication
- Heart burn medication
- High cholesterol medication
- Medication for enlarged prostate
- Epilepsy/seizure medication
- Arthritis medication

Risks from Combining Alcohol and Prescription Medications

- Worsening health conditions
- Medication not working properly or becoming toxic
- Impaired breathing
- Memory problems
- Rapid heartbeat
- Nausea, vomiting
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Drowsiness
- Changes in blood pressure

Common Health Conditions for Aging Adults

- Arthritis
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Memory problems
- Poor coordination and balance
- Weakness

Communication is Key

If appropriate, educate the person in your care about the dangers of drinking alcohol and using prescription medications. Consult a health care professional about potential interactions, if the person in your care drinks and takes a prescription medication.

When new medications are prescribed, ask the health care professional

1. How does this medication work?
2. What are its potential side effects?
3. How can we avoid potential medication interactions?
4. Does this medication interact with alcohol?
5. What foods (drinks) should be avoided when taking this medication?

Remember your “go-to sources” for information about managing medications safely: your pharmacist and your healthcare provider.

Caregiver Corner: How to Prevent Medication Interactions, *continued*

At home, here are 10 tips to manage medication safely

1. Keep a list of all prescribed medications, supplements, and over-the-counter medications.
2. Update the medication list when changes are made.
3. Bring the medications list to appointments with health care professionals and review it for potentially harmful interactions.
4. Review drinking habits of the person in your care with your health care professional for guidance.
5. Read the label and note any warnings.
6. Administer all medications exactly as directed on the label and by your health care professional or pharmacist.
7. Use a system, like a pillbox or other aid, to keep track of when medications are given.
8. Watch for medication reactions, especially when new medications are started.
9. Be aware of symptoms caused by mixing medications and alcohol and know what to do if you observe them.
10. Try to create a system for managing medication for the person in your care works for each of you.

Stay informed for the people in your care. What you don't know can hurt them!