



JUGGLING MULTIPLE MEDICATIONS?

What You Can Do to Stay Safe.

If you are like most people over 65, you're taking several different medications every day. You probably also see several healthcare professionals, manage at least one chronic condition and use more than one pharmacy. It's a lot to keep track of, but there are steps you can take to actively and safely manage your medications.

While many medications available today can greatly improve your quality of life, they also have risks. Juggling multiple prescriptions, doctors and health conditions can lead to medication confusion, over-treatment, possible drug interactions and harmful side effects, especially for older people. Also, our bodies process medications differently as we age. This means that some drugs or dosage strengths, which are perfectly safe in younger people, can be dangerous for an older adult.

You are the only person who knows all of your health conditions and medications. It's up to you to work together with your family and healthcare professionals to make sure your medication regimen is safe and effective.

Key steps to stay safe

- **Make a list of all your medications.** Bring it to all of your medical appointments and share a copy with the pharmacist when you pick up your prescriptions. Include the names and amounts (doses) of your prescription medications, as well as any over-the-counter (OTC) medications, vitamins and supplements you take. Be sure to update the list every time anything changes.

- **Beware of interactions.** Some drugs can interact with other medications, foods, alcohol and cause dangerous side effects. Interactions are a big concern for older adults, who often take multiple medications and have several health conditions.

It's important to share your complete medication list with all of your healthcare professionals so they can watch for potential drug interactions. Each time you start a new medication, ask: "Will this new medicine work safely with the other medicines I am taking?"

The US Food and Drug Administration created these tips for avoiding drug interactions:

[Common Drug Interactions](#)

The AARP developed this online tool for checking your medication list for potential interactions: [Drug Interaction Checker](#)

- **Check for red flags yourself.** Certain medications are not safe for people over 65. The Beers Criteria is a list of medications that are generally considered inappropriate for older people, though they may be safe for you, depending on your health situation. Talk to your doctor if any of your medications are included on this list.

- **Follow instructions.** Carefully read the written information that comes with your prescription medications and the “Drug Facts” label on over-the-counter product packages—use a magnifying glass if you have to! Ask your doctor or pharmacist if anything is unclear or if these instructions are available in large print.
- **Pay attention to side effects.** If you notice any changes in how you’re feeling, thinking or behaving, tell your doctor or pharmacist right away. Side effects can be a sign that you are having a serious reaction to a drug or combination of drugs, and shouldn’t be ignored.

The 3 R’s for Medication Safety

All medicines have **RISKS** as well as benefits. Weigh these risks and benefits carefully for every medicine you take.

RESPECT the power of your medicine and the value of medicines properly used.

Take **RESPONSIBILITY** for learning about how to take your medication safely.

Tips for keeping track of your medications and remembering to take them

Juggling multiple medications and remembering when to take them can be difficult for people at any age. Here are some tips to make things easier.

- **Keep things simple.** Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how you could simplify your medication schedule so it will be easy for you to keep track of everything. Also, try using one pharmacy for all prescriptions and refills—that way, the pharmacy can help you manage your refills and check for possible drug interactions.
- **Make a reminder sheet or calendar.** Writing down your medication schedule will help you keep track of what to take and when. For each medication you take, note the day and time you should take it, any special instructions (for example, “Take with food”), and where you will store it (**Note:** certain medications such as opioids, sedatives and depressants should be kept in a secure place and out of sight from other family members, especially teenagers and young adults who might try to take them inappropriately to get high).
- **Set a daily routine.** If possible, take your medicines at the same time each day, and tie your medication schedule to your daily activities. For example, you could take all of your morning medications just before or after breakfast. Or, if you need to take a certain pill each night before bed, you could keep it next to your toothbrush to help you remember.
- **Ask your healthcare professional about using reminder tools or products.** Many tools are available to help you remember when and how to take your medications. Some people use special pill containers to sort pills by day or time of day. Others use beepers, telephone alerts or programs on their computer or phone to keep track. Or, you can devise your own daily checklist or color coding system.

- **Enlist someone to help.** Take a friend or caregiver along to the doctor or pharmacy if you think you might need help understanding or remembering medication instructions.

Here's a sheet you can print out and bring to the doctor's office to help you take notes on your medications: [Make Notes & Take Notes](#)

Don't Let Your Medication Send You to the Emergency Room

In 2008, more than 680,000 people over age 65 went to the emergency room because of adverse reactions to medications, according to a 2011 report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The medicines most frequently involved in these visits were central nervous system drugs (such as pain relievers and drugs used to treat anxiety and insomnia), blood thinners (warfarin) and heart medicines.

These and other medicines are not necessarily harmful—in fact, they are often very helpful. But the high number of adverse drug reactions older people experience each year underscores how vital it is to watch for side effects, avoid harmful or unnecessary drug interactions and actively work with your healthcare professionals to safely manage your medications.