



Handle With Care: Medication Safety for Older Adults

Alex Bishop, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Science

Gina Peek, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor and
Extension Housing and Consumer Specialist

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Older Adults and Medication Use

Many older adults (age 65 and older) live with one or more health conditions. These include arthritis, heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. Multiple medicines are often used to treat these health problems.

Did you Know?

Adults age 65 years and older use more than one-third of all prescribed medicine (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014).

Preventing Medication Misuse and Reducing Risk

Misuse of medicine can result in injury or death. Every day, more than 6,000 people are treated in hospitals for medicine misuse (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Many prescription drug-related deaths are caused by:

- Self-treating without asking a doctor
- Sharing medicine with family or friends
- Taking the wrong dose of medicine
- Taking two or more narcotic pain medicines

Medication Safety Risks

Older adults most at-risk for using medicine the wrong way include those who:

- Live alone
- Complain about memory
- Take three or more prescribed medicines
- Visit more than one doctor
- Use more than one pharmacy
- Buy medicine from websites

Follow Medication Directions

Many older adults use more than one medicine. This increases risk of misuse or adverse side effects. Using medicine the wrong way can result in a medical emergency (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Make a medication list and review it once a year. Share this list with your doctor or pharmacist.

Taking Medication

Some medicines should not be taken together. Medicines should be taken only as directed. Read and save all written instructions. When taking a new prescription:

- Be sure your name is on the label
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist how to read the label
- Report any allergies or a side-effects to your doctor or pharmacist

Store your Medicine Safely

- Store in the original package
- Store in a locked cabinet
- Store in a cool and dry place
- Do not store near food
- Use a pillbox to hold a one-week supply

Reduce risk of Misuse, Abuse and Poisoning!

Many medicines can be harmful. Never let family, visitors, children or pets take your medicine.

- Create, update and review a list of all medicines you take
- Write down the day and time you take medicine on a calendar or notebook

Properly Dispose Medication

Most medicines expire in one year. Do not store or discard out-of-date or unused medicines where family members, small children, home visitors and pets can find them. Dispose any expired or unused medicines:

- Remove all names, address and phone numbers from the label
- Contact a local pharmacy or health department to find a Take-Back Program
- If you cannot find a Take-Back Program, contact local law enforcement
- If law enforcement cannot be reached, dispose of expired or unused medicines on your own
 - Fill a sandwich or plastic baggie with kitty litter or used coffee grounds
 - Place the out-of-date or unused medicine in the bag
 - Do not crush or dissolve
 - Seal the bag and place in the trash for pickup
- Some medicine can be flushed down your toilet; the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a list of medicines safe to flush (2015)
- If you have a septic system, do not flush any medications

Sometimes, older adults make mistakes taking medicine. Using medication after age 65 is often complex. Managing multiple health conditions requires instruction from different medical providers. This can be confusing. Older adults should take medicines wisely for their personal safety.

**Made a medication mistake?
Contact poison control immediately
at 1-800-222-1222.**

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Reviewers

Gloria King, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Susan Routh, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Margaret Scott, Oklahoma Home and Community Education, Inc.
Mark Stratton, Pharm.D., BCPS, CGP, FASHP, The University of Oklahoma

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