

Your Health: Staying Safe When You Take Several Medicines



Older adults and people with long-term diseases often need to take a lot of pills.

That can cause problems. If you take more than one medicine that works the same way, you could get too high a dose. Sometimes medicines work against each other.

So it's really important to ask every doctor you visit to look at your complete list of medicines.

With your help, your doctor can make sure that all the medicines you take work well together.

And you can also make sure that you're not taking any pills you no longer need.

The more medicines you take, the greater your chance of having problems. Problems may be more likely if:

- You see more than one doctor and don't tell each one about the medicines you take.

- You use more than one drugstore. Unless you tell them, those pharmacists may not know all the medicines you take.
- You're an older adult. As you age, your body slows down. Some medicines stay in your body longer.
- One medicine gives you side effects, so you take another one to feel better.
- You take herbs or vitamins without talking to your doctor or pharmacist first.

What counts as medicine?

Just about anything you take counts, whether your doctor prescribed it or you bought it over the counter.

Many people don't understand that herbs, home remedies, diet supplements, and vitamins can have strong effects on the body.

For example, ginseng and garlic supplements may raise your chance of bleeding. They could be dangerous if you take aspirin or warfarin, which can also raise the chance of bleeding.

How can you avoid problems?

Keep your doctor informed.

Make a list of everything you take. Don't forget pills like cold medicine or aspirin. Keep a copy in your purse or wallet.

Take the list to each doctor or hospital visit. Some doctors like you to bring all your pill bottles with you.

Learn about your medicines.

Follow directions about how much medicine to take and when to take it. Know what side effects to watch out for.

Keep track of your refills and when you need to pick them up.

Ask your doctor if there are any medicines you should *not* take.

Ask if there are medicines you don't need any more.

It's a good idea to ask your doctor this question regularly—maybe every 6 months or every year.

But never stop taking medicine without asking your doctor first.

Don't take anything new without asking.

Never take any kind of medicine without asking your doctor or pharmacist about it.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist to run your list of medicines through a drug interaction checker. This is a computer program that checks for drugs that can cause problems when you take them together.

Use just one drugstore if you can.

If you go to more than one, make sure each has a complete list of all your medicines.

Before you fill any new prescription, ask if the new medicine could cause problems with pills you're already taking.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.