

## MEDICATIONS

### WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I AND MY FAMILY BE ASKING?

- Am I taking the medicine for the right reasons?
  - Why am I taking these medicines? What condition are we treating?
  - Is it still needed? Has the condition changed?
  - Has the evidence for taking this medicine changed?
  - In my case, are the benefits greater than the risks of taking them?
  - Will I live long enough to gain its benefits?
  - Is the drug being used to treat a side effect only?
  - Can I stop it quickly or do I need to slowly go off of it if I need to?
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### WHAT ACTIONS CAN I TAKE FOR THIS AGENDA?

- When you have a new symptom after starting a medication, look to see if it is a side effect and discuss this with your doctor
  - Always talk to your doctor before stopping any medication. If you do, check to see if you need to stop it slowly
  - Check if your prescriber can make the medication you're taking simpler by taking it less if possible. The less frequently you have to take it the more likely you will commit to taking it
  - Check with your doctor if you can treat two diseases with one medication
  - Make sure you inform your doctor about any over-the-counter medication or supplements you are taking. Even Tylenol or Advil taken now and then should be mentioned. Other supplements such as natural fibers, teas, or home remedies should also be mentioned
  - Recognize that medications have a brand name and medical name as it can get confusing
  - Always bring all your medications to any healthcare visits especially to your family doctor, pharmacist, and geriatrician
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**WHAT DOES TAKING “TOO MANY MEDICINES” MEAN?**

- There is a concept in medicine called “Polypharmacy”
  - “Poly” means many and “Pharmacy” means medications
  - Taking a lot of medicines may be necessary despite being many
  - Usually, more than five different kinds are considered a lot
  - This topic focuses on medicines that we take that are not essential and potentially harmful for older adults
  - Some medicines work well on some older adults but not for others as our bodies are different
  - Even if you are taking a lot of medications, they may be essential for you
  - Never start or stop a new medication until talking to your doctor first
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**WHY IS TAKING MANY MEDICINES A BURDEN?**

- There is a greater chance for more side effects and drugs interacting with each other. Taking many pills will decrease your commitment (adherence) to take them correctly
  - They can also cause other issues such as the increased risk for falling, feeling tired, or having longer stays in hospital
  - Older adults have more fat in their body and their kidneys and livers aren't as sharp as they used to be
  - Many of these medications are handled differently in an older person's body compared to a younger person
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**REVIEW THE MEDICATIONS YOU’RE TAKING EACH TIME YOU VISIT YOUR DOCTOR**

**OLDER ADULTS HAVE MORE BODY FAT AND LESS LIVER AND KIDNEY FUNCTION. AS SUCH, MEDICATIONS CAN HAVE DIFFERENT EFFECTS ON THEM COMPARED TO YOUNGER ADULTS**

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**WHY IS THIS STILL AN ISSUE?**

- Some older adults take over the counter medicines or herbal medications without consulting their doctor
  - Others use multiple pharmacies to fill their prescriptions or have automatic refills which can cause an error by taking the wrong medicine for longer than needed
  - Some take medicines for many years not knowing why they are taking them. As we age, different long-term (chronic) diseases interact with one another making treatment complicated
  - Most studies and trials that look into medications exclude older adults
  - We apply these studies to older adults but the medications may not have the same effects or tolerance as they do in younger adults
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### WHAT IF I NEED THESE MEDICINES?

- Always check with your healthcare team and doctor before making changes to your medications
  - Even though you might be taking a great number of medications, they might be essential for your health
  - Never stop medications suddenly
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### DO NOT TAKE MEDICINE ONLY TO TREAT A SIDE EFFECT OF ANOTHER MEDICINE

**YOUR FAMILY DOCTOR OR LOCAL PHARMACY ARE GREAT RESOURCES TO HELP YOU LEARN MORE AND ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS**

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### WHY IS IT COMPLEX? WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MAKE TAKING MEDICATIONS EASIER?

- Older adults are sometimes expected to manage many of their medications and keep track of many pills with their frequency and dosage
- They also have to keep track of what medicines are taken at scheduled times and which ones are taken only as needed

- They also have to keep in mind which pills need to be taken with food and water and others that should not
  - One effective solution would be to use “blister packs”
  - Blister packing organizes your pills in a binder and easily shows you which pills to take at specific times in the day
  - It's affordable, saves time, and helps your doctor know what you're taking quickly and easily
  - Talk to your family doctor or local pharmacy about blister packing
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**BLISTER PACKING MAKES IT EASIER TO TAKE YOUR MEDICATIONS AS IT GROUPS YOUR PILLS FOR THE RIGHT TIME AND DAY**

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**HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY CHANCES TO TAKE MY MEDICINES CORRECTLY?**

- Committing to take your medications is called “adherence”
  - There are many ways to increase your adherence
  - Know why are you taking them and learn the most common side effects
  - Ask your doctor or pharmacy to see if they can look into options for affordability
  - The less complex and frequent a medication needs to be taken, the better
  - Having a family doctor or pharmacist review your medications
  - Blister packing your pills
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**ALWAYS MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHY YOU ARE TAKING YOUR MEDICATIONS AND HOW TO TAKE THEM CORRECTLY**

**THIS WILL INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF CONTINUING TO TAKE YOUR MEDICINE AND IMPROVES ADHERENCE**

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