



# Medication safety



## Seniors: Their medicines and safety

Why is medication safety a particular concern for the elderly?

- With a growing number of prescription medicines available and a growing population of older adults, the potential for medication safety problems is expanding.
- As people age, they are much more likely to be prescribed more than one kind of prescription medication, and many seniors take three or more. This increases the risk for drug interactions, mix-ups, and the potential for side effects.
- The effects of aging cause older adults' bodies to process and respond to medicines differently than those of younger people. Age-related changes in the liver, kidneys, central nervous system, and heart are among the contributing factors causing elderly people to be more vulnerable to overdose and side effects.
- Age-related challenges like memory loss or poor eyesight can make it harder to follow instructions for taking medication.
- Financial issues may prevent seniors from filling some prescriptions.

## High risk for Rx problems:

It's dangerous not to follow the directions for taking medications, but some factors can make that hard as people get older. Seniors should consider asking for help from their family, caregiver, doctor or pharmacist if they:

- Live alone
- Take 3 or more medications, including nonprescription medicine and herbal or dietary supplements.
- Have memory problems or are not as sharp as they used to be.
- Get prescriptions from more than one doctor.
- Fill prescriptions at more than one pharmacy.
- Use both online and community pharmacies.



### How do you avoid these problems?

First, start by slimming down your loved one's medicine cabinet. It is easy for medications to pill up and go unnoticed in a medicine cabinet, so going through the cabinet at least once a year can help slim it down. Get rid of any drugs that are outdated and expired. If the medicine has been in the cabinet for awhile and you aren't sure whether or not it has expired, it is safest to discard it.

Next, make a medication plan for your loved one that states the name and dosage for each medication. Making a list such as this one will help to keep a consistent schedule. Also, keeping medications in a central location will help to maintain a regular schedule and will also remind the elderly person to take their medicine. The pills can be kept in a pill organizer box which can be pre-filled for a week or more. This will make it easier for the elderly person to remember whether or not they took their medication for the day.

Finally, keeping a drug diary can be an easy way to be aware of any side effects your loved one may encounter while taking a drug. When the elderly person goes to a doctor visit, they will be able to show their diary to their physician who will be able to coordinate the medication routine. The drug diary can also be shown to the pharmacist when the elderly person is getting a refill or new prescription.



What to put in your drug diary:

- The name of the medication or herbal supplement
- How much you take (read the prescription bottle and copy down the instructions)
- When you take it (morning, afternoon, night)
- The condition you take the medication for

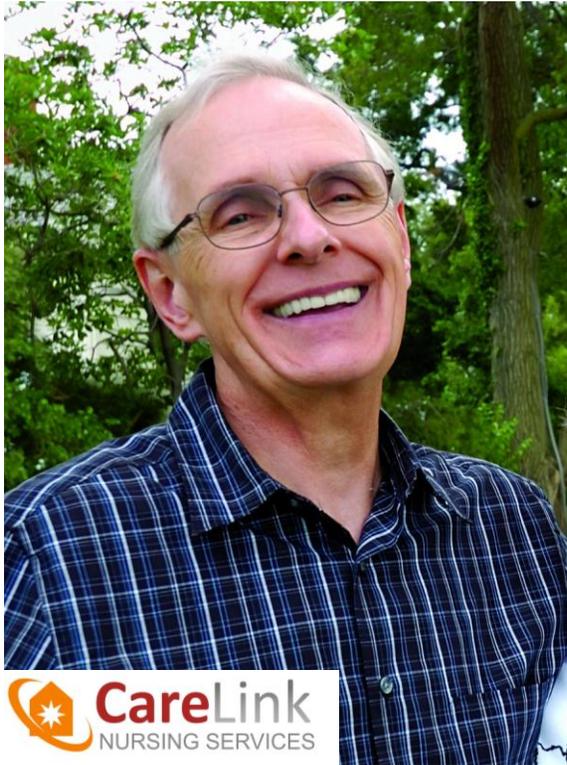
Adding a list of side effects to your diary along with a list of each of your doctors, their specialty and contact numbers will give you and your providers a valuable tool to help you manage your medications.

### How to dispose of medications properly:

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy issued the following guidelines in 2007 for the proper disposal of prescription medications:

- Follow any specific disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information that accompanies the medication. Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet unless this information specifically instructs you to do so.
- If no instructions are given, throw the drugs in the household trash, but first: Remove the drugs from their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter. The medication will be less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who intentionally may go through your trash.
- Put the drugs (or the mixture of drugs with an undesirable substance) in a sealable bag, empty can, or other container to prevent the medication from leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.

Discover CareLink- A Caring Place  
for the Ones you Love!



6060 Renaissance Place, Suite J  
Toledo, OH 43623  
[www.carelinknursing.com](http://www.carelinknursing.com)

**Visit or call us at 419-843-6049**