

How to Ensure Medication Safety

Many seniors tend to be prone to illness do to the weakening of the body's natural defence mechanisms and require a number of medications to treat various health issues.

It is vital that seniors and their caregivers educate themselves about the proper use of medication. For example, taking multiple prescription drugs at the same time which may adversely interact with one another can cause serious problems and may even be life threatening! Add over-the-counter drugs, herbal remedies and vitamins to the mix and you have the potential for drug-related problems such as memory loss, drowsiness, agitation and confusion, among others.

In fact, in a recent study on drug-related problems in senior patients by the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, twenty-five per cent of seniors claimed they were unclear about their medication regimen. The research found that better health outcomes can be achieved through greater medication education to prevent non-adherence and manage adverse effects.

The following suggestions may help to ensure safe and effective use of all medications:

- Make a list of the medications being taken. Include the dose, how often they are being taken and the name of the pharmacy where the prescription was filled. If medications change, don't forget to update the list.
- Also list any food or medication allergies, and non-prescription medications, vitamins, herbal remedies or supplements being taken.
- Read and follow storage instructions. Don't store medications in your bathroom or in direct sunlight; humidity, light and heat can sometimes affect a medication's safety or potency.
- Store medications where children can't see or reach them.
- Keep medications and household chemicals separate. Mix-ups have been known to happen and can be very dangerous. Don't keep tubes of ointments or creams next to your tube of toothpaste either.
- Keep medications in their original containers when possible. Many pills can look alike and can be taken mistakenly.
- Never take someone else's medication. You don't know if it will react with any other medications being taken, the dose may be wrong or you could have an allergic reaction to it.
- Read the label every time a dose is taken to make sure that it is the right drug and that instructions are being followed properly.

- Unless instructed to, don't chew, crush or break any capsules or tablets. Some long-acting medications are absorbed too quickly when chewed, which could be unsafe.
- When taking liquid medication, use only the cup or measuring device that came with it. Dosing errors can occur if a different cup is used because other cups are often different sizes and may have different measurement markings.
- Be aware of possible drug-related problems or side-effects that can occur and know when to seek immediate medical attention, if necessary.
- Be vigilant about avoiding particular foods or alcohol, if instructed. Also, some medications may deplete the body of certain nutrients, so it is important to find out about dietary supplements if required.

Don't forget to keep your doctor and pharmacist informed about all the medications being taken. You may even want to take all prescription and non-prescription medications, including herbal remedies and vitamins, to your next doctor's appointment or pharmacy visit for a quick review.

Source: The Care Guide (www.thecareguide.com)