

## Health Tip: Medication Safety

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Most of us at sometime or even now are taking doctor prescribed medication. Medication prescribed by the physician is designed to treat some form of illness or deficit in our bodies. Science has made great strides in treating physical and mental health conditions. This generation is living much longer than those born long ago before the development of medications such as immunizations and antibiotics to name a few. Many diseases have been virtually eradicated through the use of “Miracle Drugs” However the mis-use of medication can often be as deadly as a disease.

It is important for those taking medication or administering medication to someone to be extremely careful, to make sure that the medication is given or taken correctly. There are certain safety rules that must be followed to make sure we are taking our medication correctly.

### **SAFETY RULES FOR TAKING MEDICATION BY PRESCRIPTION OR OVER THE COUNTER (OTC) MEDICATION:**

- I. Make sure you understand why you are taking a certain medication. Never take medication prescribed or OTC, if you don't know why you are taking it. Get a full understanding from your health provider on what the drug is supposed to do for your condition. (Ask Questions)
- II. Read the labels carefully for frequency and amount of the dosage. Never change the directions without consulting the doctor that prescribed the medication. Note the expiration date on the bottle. Don't take expired drugs.
- III. Look for any special instructions along with the dosage; such as “with or without food” or other meds that should be avoided while taking the medication. Keep and read the printed information about the medication given by the pharmacist.
- IV. Don't discontinue the medication without consulting your doctor. Let the provider know if the drug is causing you problems.
- V. Never take someone else's medication even if you believe it to be the same as yours. Remember many drugs may look alike or have similar names.
- VI. More is not better when it comes to drugs. Don't double the dose because you don't feel any better. Drugs often take a while to produce a noticeable change. Don't double up because you forgot to take the drug at a usual time. Consult your medical provider regarding what to do.
- VII. Over the counter drugs and herbal preparations **can be as potent as prescription meds**. Follow the directions as carefully as you do for prescribed medication. Always let your doctor know of any drugs or herbs you are taking in addition to your prescription drugs. There may be some unfavorable interactions between them.

## **OTHER GENERAL SAFETY RULES TO FOLLOW REGARDING MEDICATIONS**

- I. Store meds as directed on the bottle. Improper storage can interfere with a drug's effectiveness.
- II. Keep a list of all medications you are currently taking.
- III. Alert your health care provider as well as your pharmacist of any allergies you have.
- IV. Keep all medication out of the reach of children. Store pain medication in a private place out of sight to everyone.
- V. Follow your county guidelines for disposal of unused medication
- VI. Notify your provider at once if you have a serious reaction to a medication. Especially if it is the first time you have taken that medication. Call 911 if your reaction is life threatening (ex. throat closing up; unable to breathe, racing heartbeat, etc.).

## **RISE IN ACCIDENTAL MEDICATION OVERDOSES**

Drug overdoses accounted for roughly one quarter as many deaths as Covid 19 did in 2020 according to the CDC. While many were due to opioid abuse some were due to inappropriate use of prescription drugs.

## **SENIORS ARE VULNERABLE TO DRUG OVERDOSES**

Because seniors are often taking multiple drugs many may become confused about the different drugs and when they should be taken. Many times, due to physical or mental decline in the elderly; drugs may not be taken correctly or omitted entirely. Medication taken incorrectly by an elderly person will often build up toxic reactions **quickly** because they are slower to eliminate toxins from the body.

When the elderly can't successfully follow their medication regime **a designated person** should be responsible for making sure their meds are taken correctly.

**KEY THOUGHT:** Prescription medication and over the counter drugs taken or used **incorrectly** can be **very dangerous**. Follow the safety guidelines.

**Information Resources:** CDC/Drug Abuse, NPR.org/ Drug Overdose, Deutermanlaw.com/older adults and overdose

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