

Tips to Better Manage Medications

Studies show that 55% of prescriptions filled aren't taken correctly. There are many reasons why people make mistakes with medications, but the consequences can be dangerous.

THE FOLLOWING ARE TIPS TO HELP MANAGE MEDICATIONS MORE EASILY:

Ask Questions

Never be afraid to ask questions. When a doctor prescribes new medications, be sure to note the following:

- Name of drug
- How, when and how long to take the drug
- Drug storage requirements
- Possible side effects and drug interactions
- What the drug is for
- Correct dosage
- Any special instructions

It is a good idea to periodically have a doctor conduct a medication review to assess which drugs are still needed and determine which ones could be eliminated.

Keep a Medication Master List

A medication master list is a complete record of all the prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and supplements a specific individual takes. This list should contain all of the information from the above list under "Ask Questions" plus:

- The color and shape of the drug (or a photo of the drug if possible)
- The prescribing physician's name and contact information
- Date the medication was started, and whether or not it should be refilled and taken ongoing
- Date the list was last updated

Keep a copy of this medication list on the refrigerator or in another easy place to find. Also keep a copy in a purse or wallet to be on hand for doctors' appointments or emergencies. This will help the doctors avoid prescribing a new medication that could have a potentially serious interaction with another medication.



Fill All Prescriptions at One Pharmacy

When someone sees several specialists, the doctors may not have a complete record of all medications the person is taking. Thus it is important to have all medications filled at only one pharmacy to safeguard against prescriptions that could have potentially serious interactions with the person's other medications. The pharmacy should also be able to easily run a report to flag any interactions or contraindications among prescribed and over the counter drugs.

Use a Pill Organizer Carefully

Pill organizers come in a wide variety of styles and may be divided by day of the week, day and night, or in detailed ways that allow 6, 8, even 30 different dispensers per day. Some include alarms or other reminder systems. Pill organizers can be a big help -- but only if they're filled properly in the first place.

- Ask the pharmacist to sort the pills when prescriptions are filled
- Keep at least one pill in the original medication container for identification purposes
- Refill the container at a regular time that can be undisturbed
- Draw a map listing each drug and where it was placed in the container
- Always have a light on when taking medications

Do Not Modify Pills

It's important to find out if a medication can be cut in half or crushed or given with food before doing so. Certain medications are designed to have a timed release that occurs gradually throughout the day. Crushing them could destroy how the drug is released, causing the person to get too much all at once or none at all.

If swallowing pills is a problem, a doctor or pharmacist may be able to provide the same medication in a smaller tablet or a liquid form.

Store Medications According to Instructions

Some drugs may need to be kept refrigerated. For non-refrigerated medications, choose a dark, dry and cool storage place. The bathroom medicine cabinet is typically not the best place to store medications due to moisture. Also be sure to discard any drugs that have expired or have no labels.

Continuum can assist clients in developing better medication management practices through regular, ongoing in-home care services and by providing helpful reminders and medication charts.

Sources: *Disabled-World.com, MAPharm.com, MedicineNet.com, Caring.com, Aging Well Magazine*