

# Medication safety essential for seniors

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Drug interactions, other problems more likely with age, FDA cautions.

(HealthDay)— Seniors need to take extra care with both prescription and over-the-counter medications, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns.

As people get older, many begin to take multiple medications. This can increase their risk for potentially dangerous drug interactions. Plus, keeping track of multiple medications and taking them exactly as prescribed can be a challenge, the FDA cautions.

"As a society, we have become reliant on pharmaceuticals to help us attain a longer and higher-quality life. It's a wonderful success of Western medicine," Rear Admiral (Ret.) Dr. Sandra Kweder, deputy director of the agency's Office of New Drugs, said in an FDA news release.

"The goal should be for each of us to access that benefit but respect that medicines are serious business. To get the most out of them, you should take them with great care and according to directions," noted Kweder.

One worry with medications is the natural changes that occur in the body with age. These changes may cause medication to be absorbed differently. If you have reduced kidney function, this could affect how some medications are broken down or excreted from your body, the FDA cautioned. Age-related changes in your digestive system can also affect how quickly medication enters your bloodstream.

"There is no question that physiology changes as we age. Many chronic [medical](#) conditions don't even appear until our later years," explained Kweder. "It's not that people are falling to pieces; some changes are just part of the normal aging process."

There are ways that older adults can ensure their safety when taking medication. The FDA provided the following tips to help prevent dangerous situations and potentially harmful interactions:

- **Follow Doctor's Orders:** It's important to take your medication as prescribed by your doctor. Do not stop taking your medication without talking to your doctor first - even if you feel fine. If you are experiencing unwanted side effects, talk to your doctor right away.

"Medication can't work unless you take it," Kweder noted. "For instance, medications that treat chronic conditions such as [high blood pressure](#) and diabetes typically only work when taken regularly and as directed. You have to take them continuously to maintain control over your condition."

It's also important to take the correct dose of your medication.

Do not skip doses or take twice as much for a missed dose. The amount of medication you are prescribed is based on research reviewed by the FDA.

"Every medicine is really different and is dosed according to what's been tested," Kweder added.

- **Keep Track of Your Medications:** It's a good idea to keep a list of all the medications you are taking. Be sure to record the dosage of these drugs. You should also write down how often and when you take your medications. It may also be helpful to give a copy of this list to a friend or relative in case of an emergency.

"You should know your medicines better than the doctor does," said Kweder.

- **Do Your Homework:** if you take more than one medication they can interact. That means one medication can interfere with how another medication works. Certain foods or alcohol can also affect medications you are taking. Some drugs may be potentially harmful if you have certain medication conditions.

It's important to read all the information that comes with your medications, including drug facts labels. Be sure to discuss any special instruction with your doctor. If you have more than one doctor, be sure to tell each one about all of the medications you are taking.

- **Get a Medication Check Up:** At least once a year, review your medications with your doctor. Confirm whether or not you still need to be taking each drug. You can also ask your doctor if a cheaper or more effective drug has become available.

**More information:** The U.S. National Institutes of Health provides more information on [drug safety](#).

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