

Taking four or more prescription meds? Consider scaling back

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(HealthDay)—More than half of Americans regularly take about four

prescription medications, increasing the likelihood that mistakes could occur, according to *Consumer Reports*.

People taking multiple prescription medications should visit their doctor for a "[medication](#) checkup."

By showing their doctor or pharmacist a comprehensive list of every [drug](#) they are taking, including vitamins and other dietary supplements, patients can be warned about potentially harmful interactions. They can also find out if any of these medications are no longer necessary, which would save them money.

Consumer Reports encourages patients to have this type of medication review at least once a year.

"Much medication use is lifesaving, without a doubt. But some drugs can potentially do more harm than good," said Lisa Gill, deputy editor of *Consumer Reports*.

"Our concern is that inappropriate prescribing can lead to unnecessary risk, including trips to the emergency room," she said in a news release from the organization.

"We hope to encourage [consumers](#) to talk with their [health care providers](#) about the meds and supplements they take, so they can ultimately lower their risk," Gill said.

Use of prescription drugs has surged over the past 20 years. The U.S. population has increased just 21 percent, but the total number of [prescriptions](#) filled by Americans has surged 85 percent—from 2.4 billion prescriptions in 1997 to 4.5 billion in 2016, *Consumer Report* said.

"There are many root causes, including a 'culture of prescribing.' Perhaps most worrisome is prescribing for pre-disease stages of a condition, such as pre-osteoporosis or pre-diabetes, where the medications offer limited benefit for people," Gill said.

"And, we've seen a push to treat common problems like back pain, heartburn and insomnia with medication before trying effective, non-drug measures first," she said.

People who are on multiple medications also need to be extra careful about possible interactions.

"The risk of adverse events increases exponentially after someone is on four or more medications," said Dr. Michael Hochman, of the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine.

The harmful effect of inappropriate prescription drugs sent 1.3 million people to emergency rooms across the United States in 2014. Of these patients, roughly 124,000 died, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Many of these medication events were preventable.

Consumer Reports advises that people consider the following questions to determine if they need to have their medications reviewed:

- How many different doctors prescribed your medication? When multiple doctors prescribe drugs, the risk for harmful interactions rises.
- Do you take over-the-counter drugs, vitamins or other [dietary supplements](#)? Even products that don't require a prescription can pose risks.
- Do you take more than one medication for the same health issue?

This could be a sign that you're taking a drug unnecessarily.

- Do you need a drug to control the side effects of another medication? This is sometimes necessary but it can also be a warning sign of trouble.
- Have you been taking your medication for more than three months? Some drugs must be taken long-term, but some can be stopped after a certain length of time.
- Are you struggling to pay for your medications? There may be other less expensive drugs that are just as effective.

More information: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration provides more tips on how to prevent [medication mistakes](#).

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