

Research shows why we forget to take our medicine, and what we can do about it

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For many people, remembering to take a daily medication can be the difference between life and death. Yet, people forget all the time. Now a landmark study from North Carolina State University has found that changes in daily behavior have a significant effect on whether we remember to take our medication - and that these changes influence older and younger adults differently. That's good news, because it means there's something we can do about it.

"We've found that it is not just differences between people, but differences in what we do each day, that affect our ability to remember to take medication," says Dr. Shevaun Neupert, an assistant professor of [psychology](#) at NC State and lead author of a paper describing the research. "This is the first time anyone has looked at the effect daily changes in how busy we are affects our ability to remember medications. We also learned that these changes in daily behavior affect different age groups in different ways.

"For example, young people do the best job of remembering to take their medication on days when they are busier than usual," Neupert says. "But older adults do a better job of remembering their medication on days when they are less busy."

The researchers evaluated study participants who were on prescribed daily medications. The participants were divided into two groups: younger adults (between the ages of 18 and 20) and older adults (between the ages of 60 and 89).

For both age groups, the researchers found that participants were more likely to remember to take their medications on days when they performed better than usual on "cognition" tests - which evaluate [memory](#) and critical thinking.

"We found that cognition is an important factor in remembering medications," Neupert says, "but that how busy we are is also important." This has very

real applications for helping people remember to take medications that can be essential to their health and well-being.

"We've found such a disparity between young and old adults, that it's clear we need to tailor our messages to these two groups," Neupert says. "For example, it is important for young people to stay busy and be active. That will help them remember to take their medications. However, we need to let [older adults](#) know that need to be particularly vigilant about [remembering](#) medication on days when they expect to be busier than usual."

More information: The study, "Age Differences in Daily Predictors of Forgetting to Take Medication: The Importance of Context and Cognition," will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Experimental Aging Research*.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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