

New study helps determine which older adults might need help taking medications

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As age increases, older adults can develop problems taking their medications. But until now, few studies have examined the traits that might cause elders to need help with their medications, or how widespread a problem this might be.

In a study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, researchers investigated this issue using data from the 10-year Duke EPESE study. They examined data from 4,106 African American and white [older adults](#) living in five counties in North Carolina.

The researchers asked the participants the question, "Are you able to take your medicine without help (in the right doses at the right time)?" The participants' [health conditions](#) included: poor vision, poor hearing, or having been diagnosed with stroke, diabetes, hypertension (also known as [high blood pressure](#)), heart attack, or cancer (except skin cancer).

The researchers also tested the participants' mental abilities and reviewed their medication containers to learn how many prescription and over-the-counter medications they took.

At the beginning of the study, 7.1 percent of participants needed help taking their medications. Three years later, 11 percent needed help who did not need help at the beginning of the study. Predictors of a new need for medication help were similar to those seen at the beginning of the study:

- Being 75-years-old or older
- Being male
- Having memory problems
- Having problems performing activities of daily living

The researchers reported that people aged 80 and older were 1.5 to 3 times as likely to need help with their medications than were people aged 65 to 69.

Men were 1.5 to 2 times as likely as women to need help. The odds of needing help were 3 to 5 times greater among people with memory challenges.

"Health conditions may worsen or not improve if older adults skip or don't take their medications properly," said Brenda D. Jamerson, PharmD, Center on Biobehavioral Health Disparities Research at Duke University. "Serious side effects may also occur from taking medications at the wrong time or in the wrong dose. Some older adults can put themselves at risk for experiencing problems if they don't receive the assistance they may need," added Dr. Jamerson.

The [researchers](#) noted their study helped identify which characteristics make it more likely that an older adult will need help taking his or her medication.

More information: Brenda D. Jamerson et al, A New Method of Identifying Characteristics of Needing Help to Take Medications in an Older Representative Community-Dwelling Population: The Older Adults Medication Assist Scale, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.14166](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.14166)

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