



SENIOR LIVING

Preventing medication mismanagement

Medication management is an important issue for seniors and their families. Failure to properly manage medications can threaten the lives of seniors, highlighting the emphasis families must place on ensuring seniors take their medications in strict adherence to their physicians' instructions.

Polypharmacy, or the taking of multiple medications for different conditions, can be a potential health hazard for the thousands of seniors who must manage health conditions with prescription drugs. Harmful drug interactions are a result of the confusion that can arise when seniors take multiple medications at the same time. The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists estimates that more than 34 percent of senior citizens are prescribed medications by more than one physician, and 72 percent use medications they were prescribed more than six months prior. Many people also have begun "pharmacy shopping" to save money. According to a study published in 2010 in American Nurse Today, 44 percent of men and 57 percent of women older than age 65 take five or more medications per

week, with some taking as many as 10.

Medication confusion is one risk, but older adults also metabolize medications differently than young people. As a result, they may be more susceptible to overdose or other ill effects. Families looking to help seniors effectively manage their medications should consider the following tips.

- Keep a running list of medications. Maintain a list of all medications being taken, noting both prescription and over-the-counter medications and any supplements and herbs. Provide a copy to any new doctors you visit and any new pharmacies you patronize.

- Use pill sorters. Medication sorters can keep medications organized and eliminate some of the personal error in medication management. Organizers have daily slots and may also differentiate between nighttime and daytime medications.

- Understand why each medication is being prescribed. Ask your pharmacist and doctor to explain why each medication is prescribed. This information should be printed on the prescription label. Some drugs

designed for one symptom may actually be used to treat other issues as well.

- Ask for help. Some seniors may benefit from friendly reminders from a loved one regarding when to take certain medications, especially if they need to take multiple doses throughout the day. Cognitively impaired seniors may require the services of a visiting nurse or another caregiver.

- Recognize that not all medications are right for seniors. The American Geriatrics Society maintains a list of medications that older adults should avoid or take with extreme caution. Some drugs pose a high risk of side effects or interactions, while others are less effective. Discuss alternatives with your physician if you are prescribed one of these medications.

- Keep a medication diary. Record any side effects that occur and how the medications make you feel. Always bring up issues promptly with a doctor.

Proper medication management can help seniors avoid drug-related accidents or worse.

How to help socially isolated seniors

The elderly population is on the rise in many countries. Advancements in healthcare and a growing emphasis on healthy lifestyles means people are living longer than ever before.

Age is often accompanied by wisdom, but men and women may also find that feelings of isolation, loneliness and depression

may also settle in as they grow older. The Journal of Primary Prevention published "A Review of Social Isolation," which observed how social isolation has been linked to numerous detrimental health effects in older adults. Some of these ailments may include increased risk for mortality, rehospitalization, falls, and dementia.

Individuals looking to give back to their communities may want to consider helping seniors in their area. Although it can be difficult to see seniors with diminished physical or mental capabilities, the rewards of interacting and helping seniors can be immeasurable. There are plenty of ways to help seniors avoid isolation and continue to live fulfilling lives.

- Provide transportation. A Place for Mom, a senior housing placement resource, notes that lack of adequate transportation is a main cause of social isolation among seniors. Voluntary or necessary cessation of driving makes getting to and from appointments or even recreational outings more difficult. Where public transportation is unavailable or challenging to come by, volunteers can help shuttle seniors to and from grocery stores, doctor's offices and any other places they need to go. Getting out regularly and seeing

new faces can help seniors overcome feelings of loneliness.

- Participate in hobbies together. Give seniors a sense of purpose by encouraging them to participate in hobbies or activities. Book clubs are one activity that can interest people of different age groups.

- Encourage exercise. Physical exercise keeps the body fit and improves mental health. Seniors can benefit from physical activity because it promotes strong bones and a healthy cardiovascular system. In addition, seniors who enroll in exercise classes at gyms or local senior centers can meet like-minded adults, helping them overcome their feelings of isolation even further.

- Provide meals and companionship. Older adults may not be getting all they need to maintain healthy weights and bodily functions. Cooking and shopping for healthy foods may be difficult. Provide seniors with healthy meals when possible, and take the time to share those meals. This can foster conversations that keep seniors' minds sharp and also may help prevent social isolation.

Seniors can benefit from many different forms of support, and helping older adults is a worthy volunteer initiative.



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