

# Tips for Taking Medicines Safely as You Age

Medicines are intended to help us live longer and healthier lives, but taking medicines the wrong way or mixing certain drugs and supplements can be dangerous. Older adults often have multiple medical conditions and may take many medicines. The following tips can help you safely take and keep track of all your medicines.



## Know What You're Taking



Mixing certain medicines can cause unpleasant and sometimes serious side effects. Make sure you know about all medicines and supplements you take, including:

- Prescription medications
- Over-the-counter (nonprescription) drugs
- Vitamins
- Dietary supplements
- Herbal remedies

Be sure your doctor and pharmacist are also aware of everything you take. Also tell your health care provider about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. These substances can have harmful interactions with certain medications and may change the way your medicines work.

## Ask Questions About Your Medicines



Ask your doctor or pharmacist any questions you have about your medications. Possible questions include:

- Why am I taking this medicine? How much medicine should I take and how often?
- When will the medicine start working? How will I know if it's working?
- What are common side effects of this medication? What should I do if I experience serious side effects?
- Is it safe to drive while taking this medicine?
- Should I take the medicine with food?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?

## Keep Track of Your Medicines



Make a list of all prescription medicines, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and dietary supplements you take. Keep one copy of the list in a safe place at home and one in your wallet or purse.

**The list should include the:**

- Name of each medicine or supplement
- Amount you take
- Time(s) you take it

**For prescription medicines, also include the:**

- Name of the doctor who prescribed it
- Reason it was prescribed

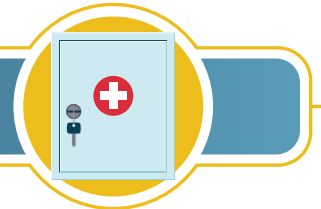
## Follow Instructions



When you have a prescription filled, read everything on the prescription label and any paper handouts that come with the medicine. Follow the instructions carefully. Here are some dos and don'ts for taking your medicines the right way:

- ✓ **DO take the right dose.** Don't take a larger dose of a medicine, thinking it will help you more, and don't skip or take half doses of a prescription drug to save money. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you can't afford the medicine.
- ✓ **DO take medicine on time.** Some people use meals or bedtime as reminders to take their medicine. You can also use charts, calendars, timers, or smartphone apps to help you remember when and how to take your medications each day.
- ✓ **DO report problems.** Call your doctor right away if you have any trouble with your medicines. There may be something else you can take.
- ✗ **DON'T stop taking your medicine abruptly.** If you have uncomfortable side effects, write them down so you can report them to your doctor or pharmacist accurately.
- ✗ **DON'T share medicines.** Do not take medicines prescribed for another person or give yours to someone else.
- ✗ **DON'T take medicines in the dark.** Turn on a light so you don't make a mistake.

## Store and Dispose of Medicines Safely



- Keep your medicines out of the reach of children and pets. If you take any prescription pain medicines (for example, morphine or codeine), keep them in a locked cabinet or drawer.
- Check the expiration dates on your medication bottles and discard any unused or expired medicines as soon as possible. Timely disposal of medicines can reduce the risk of others taking them accidentally or misusing the medications on purpose.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist how to safely discard expired or unneeded medications.

### Do I Need To Take So Many Medications?



People age 65 and older tend to take more medicines than those in any other age group, often because they have several diseases or other health problems at the same time. Taking multiple medications can be expensive and difficult to track. It also can increase the risk of side effects and other unintended problems.

If you are concerned that you might be taking too many medications, or you can't afford all your medications, have a conversation with your health care provider about whether there are any you could safely reduce or stop. But don't stop taking your medicine before talking with your doctor.

To learn more about taking medicines safely as you age, visit [www.nia.nih.gov/medication-safety](http://www.nia.nih.gov/medication-safety).

### National Institute on Aging Information Center

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NIH Publication No. 23-AG-7348 | December 2022



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