



Health Awareness

Helping Older Adults Get The Most Out Of Their Medications

(NAPSA)—Knowing more about the medications they take may help older adults get more out of these medications—and suffer from fewer adverse reactions.

At least 12 percent of Americans, 65 and older, consume 30 percent of all prescription medications and 24 percent of nonprescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medications.

Many of these adults use more than one medication to manage chronic conditions, such as heart disease, or pain, such as arthritis pain.

However, adults over 65 who take multiple medications are more susceptible to adverse reactions such as excessive sleepiness, depression, memory changes, confusion and balance problems.

The use of multiple medications—OTC, herbal and prescription—can be dangerous if not monitored by a physician, since many herbs are base ingredients for prescription drugs and some may add to the effects of prescription drugs.

For example, an herbal remedy taken for depression, St. John's Wort, should not be taken at the same time as a prescription antidepressant.

Ginkgo Biloba, an herbal remedy, can interfere with the drug Coumadin, which is used to decrease the blood's ability to clot.

Prescription drugs can also interact negatively with each other. One way to avoid this is to have all prescriptions filled at the



Several pharmacy discount programs can help seniors meet medication costs.

same pharmacy so the pharmacy can track possible interactions.

It's also a good idea to ask the doctor or pharmacist for instructions on taking medicine. Should it be taken on an empty stomach or with food? Should any foods be avoided while on the medication? What common side effects might you experience? How long before results can be seen? What happens if a dose is skipped? Can the medication be split or crushed if the pill is too large to comfortably swallow with water?

Less than 30 percent of older adults take their medication properly. This can be the result of problems with eyesight, memory problems, arthritis or financial problems (patients don't fill pre-

scriptions or take half the amount prescribed).

If eyesight is the problem, patients can request large-print labels. Multicompartment pill-boxes labeled with the day/time can help with memory problems, as can calendars, alarms and telephone notification or paging systems. There are also ways to help meet costs.

- The Pharmaceutical Manufacturer's Association produces a directory of participating pharmaceutical programs which offer prescription drugs free to those who cannot afford them (1-800-762-4636).

- The Medicine Program can help with prescription costs to qualifying individuals (1-573-996-7300) or visit www.themedicineprogram.com.

- Ask if a less expensive generic drug can be substituted for a brand name.

- Ask about senior citizen discounts.

- Investigate mail order programs.

- Ask for pharmacy discount programs from organizations specific to your condition.

To help, the MetLife Mature Market Institute has produced a guide called *Medications and the Older Adult*, one in a series of guides called *Since You Care*. For a free copy, write to MetLife Mature Market Institute, 57 Greens Farms Road, Westport, CT 06880, call 1-203-221-6580, e-mail Maturemarketinstitute@metlife.com or you can visit the Web site at www.maturemarketinstitute.com.