

Medications And The Older Adult

(NAPSA)—The good news is modern medicines can help people live longer and better lives.

The bad news is taking several prescriptions and over-the-counter (OTC) medications or herbal supplements, combined with normal changes in an aging body, can increase the chance of an adverse reaction resulting in serious health problems or disability. Both OTC and herbals can cause harmful interactions when taken in combination with some prescription medications. Nonprescription drugs are real medicine and many prescription medications are based on herbal ingredients. Studies show fewer than 30 percent of older adults take their medication properly. Almost 25 percent of all admissions to nursing homes and hospitals are related to adverse reactions to medications experienced by older adults.

The better news is there are steps you can take to prevent this problem:

- If you or a family member is taking prescription medicine, make sure to check with the physician or pharmacist about taking OTC or herbal remedies.

- Make sure to read the label on the medication to be sure it's the right one.

- Be certain you understand the directions and are aware of any warnings there might be related to taking this medication.

- Remember, drugs can interact with food, too. Some medications should be taken a certain amount of time before or after a meal. Others may need to be taken with food. Check with the doctor or pharmacist about which foods or drinks to avoid.

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A Series of Guides from MetLife in Cooperation with the National Alliance for Caregiving

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About the Subject
Medications are probably the single most important means that health care professionals have at their disposal to help prevent illness, disability and death in the geriatric population. When used correctly, prescribed or over-the-counter medications can greatly improve the health and independence of older Americans. As the number of older adults continues to rise, so do the number of medications used.

For many older Americans, using multiple medications at the same time is a necessary part of life. They use drugs to manage such chronic conditions as heart disease, lung disease, arthritis, pain and depression.

When medicines are taken correctly, they often offer the



MetLife Caregivers face many challenges as they seek the information and make decisions about how best to provide care to their loved ones. To help meet their needs, MetLife offers SinceYouCare™—a series of guides which provide practical suggestions and useful tools on a variety of specific caregiving products.

- You should also be aware that vitamins and minerals can interact with some drugs.

- Avoid taking medicine with any alcoholic beverage.

- Be sure you understand the dose/amount to be taken, the frequency and whether or not taking it at the same time every day is important.

- Ask for how long the medication should be taken.

- Ask about any known side effects or problems for which you should be watching.

- Ask for written instructions, if possible.

- Be sure the doctor's chart lists all medications. Because an older person often has more than one physician, make certain the whole medical team is informed of any current medications. Ask if the primary care physician will coordinate the drugs.

- Be sure you know why each medication is being prescribed.

- Ask if a generic substitute may be used for a brand-name drug.

- If it is a new medication, ask for only half the prescription in case it causes a reaction.

- If there is anything written on the bottle that you do not understand, ask about it.

- If you or your relative suffers from arthritis, ask the pharmacist for oversized, easy-open bottles.

- If young children visit, be sure to keep the bottles locked in a cabinet or on a high shelf.

- Ask about common allergic reactions you should watch for.

- Ask about what to do if you or your family member misses a dose. Don't wait until it happens.

- Ask if the medication is affected by heat, light or moisture.

- Ask if you can cut or crush a tablet or open a capsule.

- Ask if insurance covers the medication.

- Ask about expiration dates to determine safe and effective use.

- If you or your family member has difficulty with reading small print, ask for large-print prescription labels or use a magnifying glass to read.

Learning More

You can find additional information about medication in a free booklet from the MetLife Mature Market Institute called "Medications and the Older Adult." It is part of the "Since You Care" series of guides created in cooperation with the National Alliance for Caregiving. It includes information, resources and checklists. You can get a copy by calling (203) 221-6580, e-mailing maturemarketinstitute@metlife.com, visiting www.maturemarketinstitute.com or writing MetLife Mature Market Institute, 57 Greens Farms Road, Westport, CT 06880.