



Medication and Falls

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The word "fall" is one of the most feared words, and more so for seniors. More than 90 percent of all hip fractures are the result of falls and are the leading accident that results in emergency room visits, hospital and nursing home admissions. While most of these falls are preventable, typically little is done to prevent them and their devastating, painful, and even life-threatening consequences.

There is one thing that all seniors can do to avoid falls.....Medicate - Carefully!

Medications are absolutely needed for many of today's conditions but taking multiple medications or taking them in the wrong way can place you at a higher risk for falls. Everyone varies with his or her medical condition, the seriousness and complexities of their overall health, the various medications they take, even how and when they take them. All this and more affects can how they respond to their medications differently than other individuals.

Medications can be most dangerous when you begin taking them because you are not aware of how you will react to a new medication. The new medication does not need to be a tablet; some eye drops can affect your blood pressure and increase your potential for falls. You need to be especially careful when beginning any new medication. The next most dangerous time is when a dose is being adjusted or changed. In addition, your potential for a fall is far greater when any blood pressure medicine is added or adjusted.

"Polypharmacy" is a term you may have heard used; it is a popular term to describe when multiple medications, (five or more different medications) are used. Polypharmacy is a well-researched and documented risk factor for falls. The more medications that you use, whether you take them by mouth, use as drops or injection, the greater your potential for falls.

To avoid falls, actively discuss with your healthcare providers your need for any medication, especially the newer formulations, those advertised on television or used by friends. Many of these new medications have been extensively

researched but often the studies don't include many seniors. When seniors are included, they usually do not have the multiple medical conditions and usually do not use many medications. In addition, these newer medications usually do not have a long track record of use by seniors.

Other healthcare issues that may increase your potential for falls should also be considered. Changes in your weight may cause medications to react differently. A weight gain or loss may cause some medications to develop side effects that may lead to falls. Hydration, how much fluid—water—you consume may cause your medications to react differently. If you become dehydrated, in today's winter-heated rooms or in the summer's heat, especially when you are active, you are effectively concentrating your blood and elevating the concentration of your medications, increasing the potential for any side effect. The numerous supplements and nutritional taken by seniors are often not studied for side effects.

Here is my advice.....

Always read the consumer information that is given to you with new prescription orders. If you are given samples at your doctor's office, be sure to ask them for the consumer drug information. Read it, really read it. Highlight or circle topics you wish to discuss with your healthcare provider. Discuss any concerns before you take your first dose.

If you are taking medication for blood pressure, ask the prescriber what your target blood pressure should be. Use a home blood pressure unit to check if your blood pressure. Share your results at your next office visit. I also recommend that you take your home blood pressure unit to your healthcare provider's office to "test" and learn how close your unit reads your pressure. If your blood pressure is close to target, ask your healthcare provider if you should ever "hold" or skip a dose.

When you near your blood pressure target, other things are more likely to contribute to an even lower blood pressure. Always be mindful that when you change positions you may experience a drop in blood pressure that may lead to a fall. Getting up, especially quickly may cause lightheadedness. In addition, going to the bathroom may lower your blood pressure and lead to falls. Always stand slowly and cautiously in the bathroom. Taking hot, or even warm, baths and showers may cause those taking blood pressure and other medications to be lightheaded when standing or getting up quickly. If you take medication for

mood, nerves, anxiety, sleep or pain, you may have more side effects like dizziness, drowsiness and falls. Keep hydrated, drink of plenty of fluids, water is best and take any medication with the correct fluids.

Again, how you specifically respond to any medication is dependent on your overall health, the number and dose of the medications you use. Your medications are only part of your approach to better health. The proper use of your medications is just as important to achieve the results your desire. Learn all that you can about the medications you use, consider that your medications may be used differently to get better results and fewer side effects. To improve how you respond to your medication, you are encouraged to seek the support and direction of a healthcare professional specially trained to address the results and side effects of medications.

