



Medicine, Risks and Benefits for Today's Seniors

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For those over 50 years of age, it is extremely important to maximize the benefits of the medicines that are used while avoiding or minimizing the risks from those same medicines.

Although a medicine can make you feel better and maintain your health, we must be aware that all medicines (prescription, over the counter and supplements) have both benefits and risks.

The **benefits** of a medicine are the helpful outcomes you get by using them. Everyone understands the health benefits of a better-controlled blood pressure or blood sugar, improved mood or pain control, and the ability to avoid an asthma attack. A **risk** occurs when a medicine is taken and results in an unwanted or unintended outcome. We have all experienced a headache, upset stomach, sleepiness. Risks can range from those listed above to more serious effects such as changes in blood sugar control or liver damage.

The **risks** usually seen with medicines are many times more problematic for today's seniors. The potential for medicine risks increases with the increase in the number of medicines used (prescription, over the counter and supplements). Having a number of chronic conditions may affect how medicines are handled by your body. Changes in weight and hydration can alter the effectiveness of medicines. These are but a few ways that medicine benefits and risks are different for seniors.

There are several types of risks from medicine use:

- The possibility of a harmful interaction between the medicine and a food, beverage, dietary supplement (including vitamins and herbals), or another medicine. Combinations of any of these products may increase the chance that there may be interactions.
- The possibility that the medicine may not work as expected, for example gastric pain did not improve, bad cholesterol was not reduced.
- The possibility that the medicine may cause additional problems, such as increased drowsiness or confusion making daily activities impossible or creating an opportunity for a fall.

All medicines approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have shown that the medicine's benefits outweigh its known risks. But before using any medicine--as with many things that you do every day--you should **think through** the benefits and the risks in order to make the best choice for you.

We offer the following to help you maximize the benefits of your medicines while lowering their risks.

Talk with Your Doctor, Pharmacist, or Other Health Care Professionals

- Keep an up-to-date, written list of ALL of the medicines (prescription and over-the-counter) and dietary supplements, including vitamins and herbals, that you use--even those you only use occasionally.
- Put the start and stop dates of all medicines you use on this list.
- Share this list with ALL of your health care professionals. Tell them how your medicines make you feel.
- Report any allergies or sensitivities that you may have to ALL of your health care professionals.
- Inform ALL of your health care professionals about anything that could affect your ability to take medicines, such as difficulty swallowing or remembering to take them.
- Always ask questions about any concerns or thoughts that you may have. Keep a list of things that you would like to discuss with your healthcare providers.
- Keep a medicine diary to track what you shared with your healthcare providers and what they shared with you.

Know Your Medicines—Prescriptions, Over-the-Counter and Supplements

- The brand and generic names.
- Why you are taking each medicine and when may the benefits be seen.
- Ask to your doctor to put the reason you are using each medicine on the prescription order so the pharmacist can provide you with a detailed label for each prescription. You will more easily know which medicines are for blood pressure and which are for diabetes.
- What each dose looks like.
- Proper storage for each medicine.
- Side effects and interactions, when you should call the doctor.

- When, how, and how long to use them.
- How and under what conditions you should stop using them.
- What to do if you miss a dose.
- Whether you need any tests or monitoring or follow-up appointments.
- Always ask for written information to take with you. Keep this information with your medicine diary.
- Prescriptions drug plans may ask you to consider use of alternate medicines. You should always discuss changes with your doctor and/or pharmacist before agreeing to any change in the medicine you are using.
- Always treat such changes as new prescription orders. Review all the above items when any medicine is changed.

Read the Label and Follow Directions

- Make sure you understand the directions; don't hesitate to ask if you have questions or concerns.
- Always double check that you have the right medicine.
- Keep medicines in their original labeled containers, whenever possible.
- Read and follow the directions on the label and the directions from your doctor, pharmacist, or other health care professional.
- If you want to stop your medicine or want to use the medicine differently than directed, always discuss with your health care professional. Always keep notes about changes you make or things you discuss about the change.

Other Ways to Avoid Risks

- Always read the prescription label. Verify your name and prescription directions on the label. Never take a dose without knowing that the medicine is for you.
- Never run out of your medicine, some medicines cannot be stopped suddenly. Watch refill dates, use a calendar if needed. Watch for remaining refills, prescriptions may not be easily refillable or you may need a follow-up visit before refills are approved.
- Ask if there are interactions with any other medicines or dietary supplements (including vitamins or herbal supplements), beverages, or foods.

- Always seek the advice of the pharmacist when you are going to take over the counter, non-prescription medicines.
- Never preset or mix your medicines together in the same container unless you have discussed it with your pharmacist. A few medicines should not be mixed with other medicines; some medicines should only be stored in tightly sealed prescription vials.
- Whenever possible, use the same pharmacy for all of your medicine needs.
- When orders are being changed by your healthcare professional, always ask for a written change of order so that the pharmacist can prepare a prescription label to reflect the change of your new medicine order. Your label will be the same as how you are taking each medicine, avoiding possible over or under use.
- Before starting any new medicine or dietary supplement (including vitamins or herbal supplements), ask again if there are possible interactions with what you are currently using.
- A comprehensive medicine review by a senior care pharmacist with extensive experience in maximizing benefits and minimizing risks can have a very positive impact on the health of today's senior. Such reviews can improve, reduce and simplify medicine use and support today's seniors in maintaining both their health and independence for a longer period.

Ms. Harrelson, as a senior care pharmacist, provides **Senior Pharmacy Solutions**® comprehensive medication reviews to seniors in all levels of nursing and assisted living facilities, retirement centers, as well as to those who reside independently in their home. Working with the senior's physician, Ms. Harrelson can often reduce the number, type and cost of medications.

The benefit of our **Senior Pharmacy Solutions**® to today's senior is prolonged independence, better maintained health and conservation of personal resources by avoiding emergency room, hospital and nursing home admission. Our services contribute to an improved quality of life for the senior, their families and loved ones. "We offer services that result in peace of mind knowing that medicines are taken in a way that is most beneficial to the senior."

Visit www.SeniorPharmacySolutions.com or call 502-425-8642 for a confidential review of our services.

