

THE FAMILY CAREGIVER

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MANAGING MULTIPLE MEDICATIONS

It is estimated that 38 million older Americans suffer drug complications every year, about 180,000 which are life-threatening. They can appear as other problems common to seniors; result in dizziness, blurred vision or other symptoms that can make them prone to falls and accidents; or cause other serious side effects.

Part of the problem involves the common myths many consumers share about medication use. For example, there are still those who believe that:

- If one dose makes me feel good, a larger dose will make me feel even better.
- If one drug does not work, I should take two or three.
- If I can buy it over the counter, it must be safe.

• If my physician has not stopped the medication, I can still use it.

The biggest medication problems involve:

- Not taking medicine correctly.
- Allergic reactions.
- Drug side effects.
- Drug interactions.
- Duplication.
- Wrong dosage.
- Unnecessary or inappropriate usage.

Common drug-to-drug interactions include aspirin with a blood thinner, like Coumadin, or certain diabetic medications; antacids with heart and blood pres-

sure medications; and antihistamines with antidepressants.

By following certain protocols, seniors and their family caregivers can manage their use of medication more effectively. Experts offer these recommendations:

- Toss any expired or discontinued prescription medications.
- Only use medications that have been prescribed for you.
- Drink a full glass of water and do not lie down for 30 minutes after taking medication.
- Have all prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy.
- Check the label when you

get a prescription to verify that you're receiving the proper medication.

- Read the patient information sheet that accompanies the medication. If you do not receive an information sheet, request it from your pharmacist.
- When possible, keep all medications in their original containers to avoid confusion.
- Remember to tell your health care provider if you are taking any dietary supplements or over-the-counter medications.

The combination of seniors and medication can be a tricky proposition. Taking the necessary precautions, however, can make a huge difference in reducing the likelihood of potentially serious consequences.

RESOURCE OF THE MONTH

Hands On Huntington is a unique program that helps seniors to remain in their homes by helping them to access social, recreational and health services. Services are provided in a designated area called a naturally occurring retirement community (NORC). The case workers

of Hands On Huntington help the seniors in these communities with things like counseling, connection to benefits, coordination of doctors appointments, and minor home repairs. Hands On Huntington is funded by the New York State Office for the Aging and is a part-

nership with FEGS Health and Human Services System, a family services agency. For more information call 631-351-6610 or email: hands@town.huntington.ny.us.

