

Taking Medication Safely

Help for Baby Boomers and Others Caring for Older Adults

by Dr. Sharon A. Brangman

(NAPS)—For older adults taking many different medications, doing so safely is a daily concern for them and their caregivers. Adults 65 and older take more than 30 percent of all prescription medications. Knowing how medicines should be taken, if they can be mixed with each other, or



whether they should be taken with or without food, are just some of the questions that arise. Here are two important questions my older patients and their caregivers often ask:

Q: I'm caring for my mother who takes multiple medications. What's the best way for me to help her take them safely?

A: All medications should be kept in their original containers along with the directions—which should include the dose, how often to take it, whether to take on an empty stomach or with food or drink, and whether certain foods or liquids should not be taken with the drug. Medications shouldn't be mixed or transferred to other bottles. Many caregivers find it helpful to use a day-of-the-week pill storage container. It is a good idea to keep this container in a central location, such as the kitchen, which may make it easier to remember.

Keep a list of all medications and bring it to every visit to the health clinic, hospital or medical office. This list should include both prescription and over-the-counter drugs that you buy on your own. Be sure to include why each drug is taken, the dose, who prescribed it, possible side effects and the time of day the drug should be taken. A copy of the drug list should be kept at all times with the patient, at home (on the refrigerator is a good place) and with the caregiver.

Medication reactions do not always appear soon after starting a new medication. Whenever a new symptom appears, all of the patient's medications should be considered as the possible cause.

Q: How can a primary care provider help me with medication management and what should I do when any new medication is prescribed?

A: Primary care providers—such as geriatricians, geriatric and adult nurse practitioners, internists and family doctors—play important roles in coordinating care for older adults, who often see many health care providers. Primary care providers can provide both a thorough geriatric assessment and oversee all of the care a patient may be receiving. A review of each and every medicine you are taking (including over-the-counter medications, vitamins and herbal supplements) is something a primary care provider should do at least once a year.

Whenever a new medication is prescribed, be sure to ask what the new drug is for, what side effects it can cause and what should be done if side effects occur. Find out if the new medication could react with any of the current medications you are taking. Get all medication instructions in writing, including when and how to take it, if possible.

Your pharmacist is another important resource when you have questions about your medication.

Always ask if your medications are available as a generic or if there are lower cost drugs that would meet your needs.

For help finding a geriatrician, contact the AGS Foundation for Health in Aging at (800) 563-4916 or via www.healthinaging.org.

• *Sharon A. Brangman, M.D., is treasurer of the American Geriatrics Society and Division Chief of Geriatrics at SUNY Upstate Medical University.*

Healthy Ideas

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