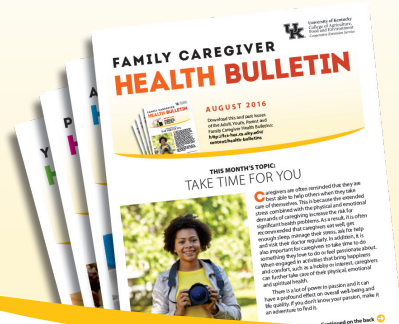




# FAMILY CAREGIVER

# HEALTH BULLETIN



**NOVEMBER 2018**

Download this and past issues of the Adult, Youth, Parent and Family Caregiver Health Bulletins:  
<http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/health-bulletins>

## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# KNOW YOUR MEDICATIONS



**I**t is not uncommon for older adults to develop health concerns or conditions for which medications are prescribed. As a result, the average older adult takes more than four prescription medications and two over-the-counter medications at once (WebMD, 2018). This scenario leads to polypharmacy: an alarming scenario in which people take five or more medications. While some conditions require a combination of drugs, this should only be done under the careful supervision of a healthcare provider.

Overall, taking multiple drugs at once is dangerous because it puts a person at greater risk for adverse drug interactions and negative side effects (Boodman, 2017; WebMD, 2018). Older adults can be especially sensitive to drugs due to slower metabolisms and organ function, which affects how drugs are absorbed, how organs will react, and how quickly medication is eliminated (WebMD, 2018).

**Continued on the back**



# It is important to review all prescription and over-the-counter medications regularly with healthcare professionals.

## ➔ Continued from page 1

People who are able (and caregivers for those who are not) need to think twice before taking or giving any medication and should question both doctors who prescribe and pharmacists who fill prescriptions so they know exactly what is being taken, why it is being taken, and what side effects/interactions might occur with existing medications.

In addition, it is important to review all prescription and over-the-counter medications regularly with healthcare professionals. When prescribed new medications, it is also wise to get a reassessment of previously prescribed medications.

According to WebMD (2018), awareness and assertiveness can help eliminate problems:

- **Call a healthcare provider** if you or a loved one experiences symptoms, such as dizziness, constipation, upset stomach, sleep changes, diarrhea, incontinence, blurred vision, mood changes, a rash or other symptoms after taking a drug.
- **Tell your doctor AND pharmacist about all of the drugs you take.** If you have multiple doctors, be sure to communicate the same information to all of them and look into seeing if one of them would be willing to coordinate your drugs.
- **Keep track of side effects.** Keep an ongoing list of symptoms and keep in mind that what you are feeling may not be a result of old age or your condition, but may be from the drug you're taking.
- **Educate yourself about your medications.** Read and ask questions about your medications, including proper medication, side effects and interactions with other drugs.
- **Review your medications with healthcare professionals.** Take all of your medications with you to both your doctor and your pharmacist. Be sure that you understand what they are for and why you need to take them.
- **Ask questions.** Ask the doctor about time frames and how to know whether or not a prescription is working and when you can stop taking it.
- **Follow directions.** Read the labels and confirm with a pharmacist that you know how to take the

medication. Should you take it with food? When should you take it? What is the correct dosage?

- **Remember to take your medications.** Create a system that helps you remember, such as alarms, notes in a calendar, or a pillbox.

## The INCREASE study

If you think you are taking too many medications or if you are concerned that your medications may be doing more harm than good, you may be interested in the INCREASE study at the University of Kentucky Sanders Brown Center on Aging.

The INCREASE study will investigate if changing some of the medications you are currently taking could help delay or prevent the onset of memory and thinking problems caused by Alzheimer's disease and other disorders of aging. Participation will involve eight study visits in approximately one year.

### For more information, please contact:

Shani Bardach

shbardach@uky.edu  
(859) 323-1331

Brooke Beech

brooke.beech@uky.edu  
(859) 323-4547



### REFERENCES:

- American Geriatrics Society (2017). Older adults who take many medications have a higher risk for becoming frail. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/02/170201131454.htm>
- Boodman, S. G. (2017). Washington Post The other big drug problem: Older people taking too many pills. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/the-other-big-drug-problem-older-people-taking-too-many-pills/2017/12/08/3cea5ca2-c30a-11e7-afe9-4f60b5a6c4a0\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.d64b8648b7d9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/the-other-big-drug-problem-older-people-taking-too-many-pills/2017/12/08/3cea5ca2-c30a-11e7-afe9-4f60b5a6c4a0_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d64b8648b7d9)
- WebMD. (2018). Medications and Older Adults. Retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/medications-older-adults#4>

FAMILY CAREGIVER  
**HEALTH BULLETIN**

Written by: Amy F. Kostelic, Ph.D.

Edited by: Connee Wheeler

Designed by: Rusty Manseau

Stock images: 123RF.com

