



Tips For Taking Meds

Q: Is there a way to keep my medications straight?

A: As many as 75% of the elderly don't take their medications as prescribed by their doctor. They call this "medication noncompliance." The three most common mistakes are 1) underuse of drugs 2) forgetting to take meds and 3) altering schedules and doses.

Here are some tips to help you take your medicines correctly:

- If you are taking different medications at various times during the day, check with your doctor to see if your medications can be consolidated, or if you can get a longer-acting formula that requires less doses per day.
- If it's hard to take your medicine for any reason, ask if a liquid or tablet form is available. If pills are hard to swallow, get a pill crusher to grind them up. Large tablets can be cut along the score mark-but check with your pharmacists, since not all medications can be broken or crushed.
- If you have any side effects from a drug, tell your doctor. Adjusting the dose might take care of the problem, or switching to a different medication. But don't skip medications or adjust the dose on your own.
- Get a pillbox to help keep your pills straight. You can get an electronic pillbox timer that sounds an alarm when the dose is due.
- Use a pocket or purse-sized pillbox to keep your meds handy. Keep two supplies--one at home and one in your car or at work.
- Be familiar with the dosage instructions. Seniors can be more sensitive to side effects.
- Some over-the-counter drugs should be avoided when taken along with prescription drugs. Over-the-counter medications may weaken a particular prescription's effectiveness.
- Learn what to do if you miss a dose. Doubling a dose to make up for a missed dose can be dangerous.
- Don't just discontinue a drug. Stopping abruptly can have bad consequences, especially if you've been taking that drug over a long period of time.
- If you are skipping doses because a drug is too expensive, talk to your doctor about the free drug programs offered by most pharmacy companies, or call the Massachusetts Prescription Advantage program at 1-800-AgeInfo.
- Post a current list of drugs you take on your refrigerator.

Get a family member or friend to help you review each drug you take, and go over these drug tips with them.