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Safe and Sound: How to Prevent Medication Mishaps
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People with chronic illnesses or conditions take more medications than anyone else
Some scary statistics about medication problems

- Medication errors harm an estimated 1.5 million people yearly
  - Institute of Medicine

- Between 40-75% of older people do not take their medications correctly
  - National Council on Patient Information

- Improper use of medications causes 18 million ER visits a year
  - Institute for Safe Medication Practice

- Good health outcomes are three times less likely for patients who do not take medications correctly as compared to those that do
  - DiMatteo et al., 2002
An Rx Dictionary

Some definitions for our discussion:

▪ **Medication adherence**
  - The extent to which patients take medications (both Rx and Over-the-Counter “OTC”) as instructed by their health care practitioners

▪ **Adverse drug reaction**
  - An unintended and negative reaction to a medication

▪ **Medication error**
  - A preventable event that can lead to patient harm or inappropriate use of a medication

▪ **Medication reconciliation**
  - The act of reviewing all of a patient’s medications before ordering a new one to ensure that there are no overlaps or potential negative interactions
The Who What Where When and Why of Medication Safety
Key Players on a Medication Safety Team
WHO

- Doctors and other prescribers
- Pharmacists
- Hospital staff – nurses and discharge planners
- You and your care recipient (the patient)
WHO: Questions to Ask Your Medication Safety Team

- How will we know the prescribed medicine is working?
- What are the possible side effects?
  - Are there any side effects to look out for?
  - What should we do if these occur?
  - Can we do anything to avoid or minimize possible side effects?
- Will this drug interact with what my loved one is currently taking (including OTC medications)?
- Are there medications to be avoided while on this?
**WHO: Questions to Ask Your Medication Safety Team**

- How should my loved one take this medicine?
  - With/without food?
  - Are there any foods that should be avoided?

- How long is the drug supposed to be taken?

- What might happen if my loved one skips a dose and/or all of the pills aren’t taken?

- How much does this medicine cost?
  - What are our options if we cannot afford it?
WHO: The Community Pharmacist

An Important Medication Safety Team Member!

- Use a single pharmacy if at all possible
- Develop a strong rapport with your pharmacist and let him/her know you value their advice
- If a medication looks different, ask why!
- If on multiple medications, ask if they can all be taken at the same time to minimize the possibility of you missing a dose
- Ask about Medication Therapy Management (MTM) as a resource
- Ask for advice when purchasing OTC medications, herbals and supplements, including how they will react with prescribed medications
What Can Family Caregivers Do?
WHAT You Can Do to Avoid a Negative Rx Experience

- Maintain an up-to-date medication list
  - carry two copies with you at all times

- Know why a medication is being prescribed and what it is supposed to do – and not do

- Don’t take anything for granted – ask lots of questions – especially when you have a gut feeling that something isn’t right
WHAT You Can Do to Avoid a Negative Rx Experience

- Describe symptoms
  - Don’t suggest a diagnosis

- Communicate Effectively
  - Know how to be taken seriously and not be seen as a troublemaker

- Devise a system for managing medications on a daily basis
Develop A Medication List

- Maintain a list of current prescription and OTC medications
  - Do what is easiest for you
    - Create your own form
    - Use forms from the internet
    - Use computers/technology

- Where to keep the list
  - In your wallet/purse
  - On the fridge (especially if the care recipient is home bound)
  - In patient file
  - On a flash drive

Tip: Have two copies with you; one to give away, one to keep
What Should be on the Medication List?

- Name of drug – generic and brand names
- Dosage
- What the pill/capsule/liquid looks like
- What the drug is for
- Potential side effects
What Should be on the Medication List?

- Instructions:
  - How and when to take the medication
  - What not to do when taking the medication

- Name/contact info of prescriber (MD, physician assistant, nurse practitioner)

- Name/contact info for pharmacy that filled the prescription(s)

- Start and stop date

- Drug allergies and other significant reactions
Help Your Loved One Take Their Medications Properly

- Monitor doses through the use of pill boxes or other technology
- Monitor your family member’s emotional health
- Use auto-refill programs
- Know what to do if a dose is accidentally skipped
**WHERE:** Medication Safety Tips for Specific Settings

- **When you enter the hospital**
  - Make sure a copy of the patient’s medication list goes into his/her file

- **During a hospital stay**
  - Check with the nursing staff to make sure that your loved one is receiving his/her daily medications - the ones that have nothing to do with why he/she is in the hospital

- **At discharge**
  - Don’t leave until you understand all the instructions. Be sure to ask whether any new prescription is to replace a medication you have at home
WHERE: Medication Safety in the Hospital

- Bring two copies of the up-to-date medication list with you
  - One for the patient’s file and one to keep with you
- Develop a good rapport with the nursing staff
- Clearly report symptoms – be objective
- Ask questions! Know who has the answers you need
- Remember the importance of discharge instructions
  - Learn about the discharge process at registration and start making plans
- Take notes!
WHERE - Medication Safety Tips for Specific Settings

- At the pharmacy
  - make sure you are being given the right medication. If you are renewing medications, make sure the refill looks just like your previous prescription.

- In the doctor’s office
  - have the doctor spell out the name of the medication and indicate what it is for

- At home
  - write the name of the condition being treated on each container
WHERE: Medication Safety in the Doctor’s Office

- If you do not have a current medication list, bring the actual prescription bottles to the doctor’s office
- When you are given a prescription, be sure you understand the doctor’s directions and can read the prescription
- Ask lots of questions!
When are Medication Problems Most Likely to Occur?
WHEN

- The prescription is written
- The prescription is filled or re-filled
- Changes in medical condition
- Transitions in care and care settings
- Seeing multiple providers
WHEN

- Using multiple pharmacies
- Taking multiple medications
- Prescriptions are not taken as directed
- Prescriptions are not taken at all
- Prescribers/pharmacists are unaware of over-the-counter medications, herbals and supplements being taken
Because you and your loved one are the only consistent team members across all settings.
Care Transitions

- Medication mishaps are more likely to happen when your family member is changing care settings/providers
- 20% of Medicare beneficiaries are re-hospitalized within 30 days of discharge
- Ensure that the providers in each setting have an updated medication list
- Clear communication is critical!
Medication Disposal

Step 1: Crush or dilute medication
Step 2: Put medication in plastic bag
Step 3: Add kitty litter, sawdust, or coffee grounds to plastic bag
Step 4: Seal plastic bag and place in trash

*Most* medications should not be flushed. Check with the pharmacist to find out if your loved one’s (or yours) are the exception and should be flushed down the toilet.
Join National Family Caregivers Association!

Membership is **FREE** to all family caregivers.

Go to

[thefamilycaregiver.org](http://thefamilycaregiver.org)

Members receive the NFCA monthly e-letter, quarterly e-newsletter, the *education and empowerment* series of print pamphlets, as well as the support that comes from joining a community of others who “walk in your shoes.”
The Companies and Foundations That Made This Program Possible Include:

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Thank you!

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