

# Medication Safety for Older Adults



## When medications can cause harm: Side effects and interactions

While medications are typically designed to provide the same benefit for all users, physical changes as we age can cause a drug to work differently or cause unintended side effects.

### Drug interactions can occur when:

- One medication affects how another one works;
- A medical condition you have makes a certain medication potentially harmful;
- An herbal preparation or supplement affects the action of a medication;
- An over-the-counter remedy affects the action of a medication;
- A food or non-alcoholic drink reacts with a medication; or
- An alcoholic drink interacts with a medication.

Some medicines that work well for most adults may not be recommended for older adults. These potentially harmful medications are included in a widely used tool for health care professionals called the “**Beers List**,” named for the physician who created it. Ask your health care provider about the Beers List and whether any of the medications you take are on it. The American Geriatrics Society’s Health in Aging Foundation advises older adults to be careful with certain types of medications, including:

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) used to treat pain and inflammation;
- Specific medicines used to treat heart failure and irregular heartbeat;
- Some diabetes drugs;
- Muscle relaxants;
- Certain medications used to treat anxiety or insomnia;
- Certain anticholinergic drugs;
- Certain non-prescription remedies for coughs, cold and allergies; and
- Antipsychotics.