

Medication Safety for Older Adults



When medications can cause harm: Misuse, abuse and addiction

While medications are generally intended to make us feel better by treating disease or managing symptoms, they can be harmful in some situations. Reasons older adults may be more likely to misuse medications include taking multiple medications from different prescribers, changes in how our bodies process medications and issues with vision, hearing and brain function. Misuse sometimes can lead to drug abuse or addiction.

Medication misuse includes:

- Taking more or less of a prescription medication than prescribed;
- Taking a prescription medication for a reason different than what is was prescribed for; or
- Sharing or taking someone else's prescription medication.

Signs of abuse or addiction include:

- Changes in expected emotional response and rapid mood swings;
- Dramatic changes in sleep patterns;
- Unexplained missing personal items and money;
- Frequent doctor visits;
- Sudden dramatic weight loss;
- Constipation without reasonable explanation;
- Small or pinpoint pupils;
- Smoking or frequent abuse of alcohol;
- Aggressive behavior to obtain prescriptions;
- Sharing medications;
- Increasing dose without discussing with a health care provider; and
- Personal or family history of substance abuse.

For info about addiction services and referral, call the **Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services** at **1-877-275-6364**.