

Medication Safety for Older Adults



When medications can cause harm: Non-prescription does not equal safe

While medications are generally intended to make us feel better by treating disease or managing symptoms, they can be harmful in some situations. Many older adults are hospitalized because of problems related to non-prescription (or over-the-counter) pills, liquids, medicated creams, lotions and other formulations.

Non-prescription medicines should be treated with the same care and respect as prescription medications.

- Tell your health care provider about all the prescription and non-prescription medicines you take. Since many prescription and non-prescription medications contain the same ingredients or have the same effects, taking them together can amplify these effects and cause problems.
- Read and follow instructions on the Drug Facts label on non-prescription packaging. If you've been taking non-prescription medications (including common pain and allergy remedies) for a long time, read the label to make sure you are still taking them according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Certain medical conditions (such as high blood pressure or asthma) can make some common non-prescription medications unsafe for you to take. If your health care professional diagnoses you with a new condition, ask if any of the non-prescription medications you take could be a problem.
- Pick non-prescription medications that treat only the symptoms you have and contain only the ingredients you need. Avoid multi-symptom remedies unless otherwise directed by your health care professional or pharmacist.
- Non-prescription medications are usually intended for short-term use. If your symptoms don't go away within a reasonable time, or worsen, talk to your health care provider.