

# Medication Safety for Older Adults



## Take your medications safely

About three out of five older adults take their prescriptions improperly and 140,000 older Americans die each year as a result. Listen closely when your health care professional prescribes a medication for you, and always follow your doctor's directions when taking your medicine.

- Ask about directions you don't understand, such as "take with food," "on an empty stomach," "once/twice/three times/four times daily," and "as needed."
- Check the label to make sure that the drug name, dosage and directions are the same as what your doctor told you.
- Do not take prescription medications that were not prescribed for you by one of your health care providers.
- Do not share your prescription medicines or take someone else's medications (in some cases, sharing medication may be against the law).
- If you experience side effects (particularly after starting the medicine or increasing the dose), talk to your doctor or pharmacist immediately.
- Don't stop taking your prescription medication, skip doses or otherwise change the amount of the medicine you take without talking to your health care provider (even if you feel better or think the medication isn't working).
- If you cannot afford your prescribed medications, ask your health care provider or pharmacist if there is a less expensive alternative.
- If you cannot read your medication label or have trouble opening the container it is in, ask your pharmacist about alternative labels and packaging.
- Read the information that your pharmacist includes with your medicine. If you don't understand something, ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain.
- If you have trouble sticking to your medication schedule, ask your doctor or pharmacist about ideas and products to help, such as linking medicines with daily routines, using a pill organizer, computer or smart phone reminders and more.