

# YOUR RISK & MULTIPLE DOCTORS

## Ask Your Pharmacist

A recent analysis of prescription drug alerts found that the greater the number of physicians seen by a patient over age 65, the greater the number of prescriptions the patient fills, and thus the greater risk for dangerous drug errors including drug-to-drug interactions, under- or over-utilization of a drug, duplication of therapies, and incorrect dosages.

Seniors receiving prescriptions from two different physicians filled an average of 27 prescriptions in a year and were at risk for 10 potential prescription drug errors. When seniors received prescriptions from seven physicians, the number of prescriptions increased to 52 and the number of potential drug errors more than doubled to 22 in one year, compared to those only seeing two physicians. When the care team reached 10 different physicians, patients filled an average of 66 prescriptions, and potential errors tripled.

Medicine use in older adults results in millions of drug-related injuries a year, with a large percentage of those injuries being life-threatening or fatal. Behavior-altering drugs such as anti-psychotics, antidepressants and sedatives that may cause dizziness and confusion bring the greatest risk. So-called symptoms of "old age" like forgetfulness and insomnia may also mask drug side-effects, causing doctors to prescribe even more medicine to treat the "age-related" symptom.

The findings, conducted by Medco Health Solutions, Inc. of New Jersey, also call into question how well different doctors and specialists caring for patients over 65 exchange information about the medications they are prescribing, and statistically correlates a larger care team with a greater risk for preventable medication errors.

Many older patients have more than one doctor prescribing medications. Some prescriptions may come in from the general practitioner, some from a specialist, and some from the dentist. While every medication has a benefit, using multiple medicines together may lead to potentially dangerous interactions. In addition to the drug error, the more medications you take, the greater your risk for dangerous interactions.

The analysis identified the increased risk of drug errors associated with the number of physicians a patient sees and the number of pharmacies at which a patient fills their prescriptions -- a growing trend referred to as polypharmacy. The analysis compared the potential error rates among patients 65 years of age and older with the rates of patients under age 65. The findings suggest that patients over age 65 consistently experienced a drug error rate approximately seven times greater than patients younger than 65. Seniors faced an average of 13 potential drug errors per patient, compared to two per patient among those younger than 65.

Doctors who treat older patients said while the analysis is not surprising, it underscores the need for each patient to have a central repository of medical information.

The recent implementation of Medicare Part D has seen an increase the number of seniors with prescription drug coverage is likely to make this drug safety situation far worse. A recent PricewaterhouseCoopers report estimates that Medicare Part D will result in a 20 percent or more increase in prescription drug utilization by those not currently insured.

While pharmacies cross-check for potentially dangerous interactions when filling a new prescription, that may not be enough because the pharmacist may not know all of a patient's medical conditions nor may they be aware of other drugs the patient is taking. The Medco analysis also found that nearly one-fourth of the seniors filled prescriptions at three or more pharmacies.

Medication side effects also hit seniors the hardest. It is well known that seniors are more sensitive to medications. The consequences of medication-related problems are a potential health problem that is particularly acute for the elderly population. Elderly persons are more prone to the side effects of medication, which is not because of their age, but because of age-related changes in their bodies. They have lower lean body mass, lower total body water and higher fats. These changes, affect the way the body reacts to medication, making it different from those who are younger. So, these factors affect the elimination of the medication as well as the duration it stays in the body.

It is therefore important to know all of the medications (prescription and non-prescription) you are taking, so that our pharmacist can also check for drug-drug interactions.

For every medication that enters your body, at least two basic actions must take place: 1) the body must absorb the medication through the stomach or intestine, and 2) the active ingredient within the medication must reach and bind to its target within your body, such as a red blood cell.

Now let's say that you take three different medicines with breakfast. To be effective, each medicine must be absorbed into the body and each must reach its own target. But what if these medicines interact with each other, instead of fulfilling their own separate purposes? At least, the medications may become ineffective; at worst, they may produce a harmful reaction within the body.

Or perhaps, with breakfast, you drank a glass of grapefruit juice, known to increase the potency of certain drugs such as the cholesterol-lowering statins. Add to this your daily multivitamin and other nutritional supplements, and you can very quickly and unwittingly produce a dangerous "chemical soup."

It is essential that you have a review of all your current

for your best health

**Visit our pharmacy or website to learn more about multiple doctor risk factors.**



# MULTIPLE DOCTORS (continued)

medications and any supplements or herbal products you may be taking. Our pharmacist will be happy to review this for safety issues such as interactions.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT INTERACTIONS OR ERRORS?

According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), older adults should actively communicate with their doctor and pharmacist at all steps of the healthcare process. Let's take a look at some guidelines for safe medicine use.

Talk to your doctor about all the medicines you take. This includes prescription and non-prescription drugs, vitamins, and herbs.

Find the right pharmacist who has the time and inclination to provide you with the care and advice you need. Have your pharmacist review your drugs.

Have all your prescriptions filled at one pharmacy. Our pharmacist will regularly update your file to check for potential interactions and depletions.

Keep track of side effects.

Learn about your drugs. Read the package inserts and any material that our pharmacist may provide. Don't hesitate to ask questions - we're available to you both by phone and email.

Follow directions. Make sure that you understand the directions before taking the drug; ask your pharmacist about how to take it, when, and if you should separate it from other drugs or foods.

Don't forget to take your medicines. Use a memory aid to help you--a calendar, pill box, or your own system.

Nutritional supplementation may also help to replace some of the nutrients your diet lacks. Your medicines may even be causing nutritional depletions that you don't know about. Our pharmacist will consult with you to find an optimal supplementation program that fits your individual needs.

## WHAT SHOULD I KNOW BEFORE BUYING A SUPPLEMENT?

Consultation with a pharmacist becomes incredibly important for older patients, who may be taking multiple prescription medications, which could be causing depletions, or may interact with certain supplements.

Supplements often recommended for aging include:

*Vitamins, Minerals, and Trace Elements* - all are important but magnesium, calcium, vitamins A, C, E, B-complex, and trace minerals are crucial since it is difficult to get all you need in your diet.

*Antioxidants* - vitamins A & E, coenzyme Q10, selenium.

*Essential Fatty Acids* - all omega-3 and omega-6 oils (borage, flax, and fish).

*Herbs and Phytonutrients* - ginkgo biloba, carotenoids, bioflavonoids, garlic, and super green foods.

*Fiber*

According to your particular medical history, you may not need all of these nutrients, or you may need more. Contact our pharmacist today to learn more about your particular supplementation needs. Let our pharmacy be your healthcare hub, so to speak, by monitoring your drug regimen for safety issues.

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