

Drug Safety: Managing Multiple Drugs

The more drugs you take, the more likely you are to have a problem.

- You may have a hard time keeping track of all your drugs.
- You may find it hard to pay for all your drugs.
- You may take a drug that you do not need. Studies show that nearly 1 out of 5 people take a drug they do not need. For people over 65, the problem is worse.
- You may not be taking a drug that you do need.
- You may take the wrong drug for your condition.
- You may have serious side effects.

Your chance of having a problem is even greater if:

- You take 5 or more drugs.
- You take drugs for 3 or more health problems.
- You get prescriptions from more than one doctor.
- You got prescriptions during a recent stay in the hospital.

Our advice:

Review all your drugs with your doctor every 6 to 12 months.

The best way to make sure you are taking the right drugs is to review all your drugs with your primary care doctor. You should also review your drugs with your specialists.

- Take all your bottles with you. Include vitamins, herbs, supplements, and over-the-counter drugs, like ibuprofen.
- Or bring a list of the drugs and how much you take. For help making a list, visit www.ahrq.gov. Search for “medicine record form.”
- Make a list of any side effects or problems you are having with your drugs. For example, sleepiness and an upset stomach are side effects of some drugs. But **DO NOT** stop taking a drug unless your doctor tells you to stop.

Make an appointment with your doctor to review all your medicines. Take in all the bottles. Take all your vitamins and supplements, too.



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When you review your drugs with your doctor, ask these questions about each drug you take:

Do I still need this drug?

Each of your drugs was prescribed for a specific problem. If you no longer have that problem, ask your doctor about stopping the drug.

Does this drug do the same thing as another drug I take?

This can happen because you got similar drugs from different doctors. Or you may take a brand-name and a generic drug that do the same thing. You may not need both drugs.

Should I still be taking the drug?

Make sure you are not taking a drug longer than you need to. For example, if you take a proton pump inhibitor (PPI) for heartburn, such as Prilosec or Prevacid, you can usually stop after 6 months. There are some drugs, like pain medicines, that you should use for only a short time.

Is there anything else I can do instead of taking this drug?

There may be other treatments or lifestyle changes that you can try. For example, if you have high cholesterol, making changes to your diet may work as well as taking a drug.

Is the drug safe for people my age or people with my health problem?

There may be drugs that you should not take if you are older. This is because the body processes drugs differently as we age.

Or, you may be taking a drug that is not safe because the doctor who prescribed it did not know all of your health issues.

Does this drug interact with any other drug I am taking?

Drug interactions can cause several problems. One or more of the drugs may be less effective. You may have more side effects.

Mixing drugs, vitamins, and herbs can also cause problems. For example, some drugs are less effective if you are also taking iron supplements. You can check for drug interactions at our free website, www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org. Click on Prescription Drugs, and then on My Medicine Tracker.

Tips for managing multiple drugs:

- Keep a list of all the drugs you take. Put it in your wallet.
- Keep the bottles your drugs come in. They help you remember the names of the drugs and how to take them. The label also tells you how many refills you have left and where to call for a refill.
- Make a schedule that shows when to take each drug. List the time, the name of the drug, and the amount you should take.
- You can use pill organizers, timers, and alerts to help you take the right pill at the right time.

Resources

To learn more about your drugs, visit:

- www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs
- www.medlineplus.gov

