

Managing Medications

THIS FACT SHEET discusses the information you need to know about medications being taken, problems that can occur and how to manage medications safely.

As people get older, they often end up taking a range of medications for various conditions. Medications can have side effects that differ from person to person or with age, because the body processes them differently. Depression and confusion are common side effects.

Drugs can also interact with each other. The interactions can be difficult to predict and may cause unexpected side effects: one or other drug may become less effective, for example. The more medications a person takes, the more likely such interactions are.

Reducing distress and agitation can also help to reduce the number of medications a person needs. Encourage the person you are caring for to have a social life, to get out and about, to be involved in activities that hold their interest and to stay as physically active as possible.

Medication Don'ts

Don't stop using a prescribed medicine unless the doctor tells you to. Some medicines are not effective unless they are used all the time and for a long period.

Don't use other people's medicines.

Don't use medicines that are out of date. They may no longer be effective.

Don't keep old or unused medicines. Your pharmacist can dispose of them for you.

Don't change the dose or the time the medicine is taken without the doctor's advice.

Questions You Should Ask

Do ask questions of your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. If you don't understand something, ask

for it to be explained in simpler terms. If you need an interpreter, ask for one. It is important to understand the following points about any medication.

Checklist

- > What is the name of the medicine and what is it for?
- > Are there any possible side effects? Will they fade with time or continue as long as the person is taking the drug? What should you do if there are side effects?
- > How long should the person be taking the medicine?
- > What should you do if a dose is missed?
- > Will the medicines interfere with others being taken? Take a list of all the person's medicines or all the medicine containers with you.
- > Will the medicine affect other medical problems the person has?
- > Is there anything the person should avoid doing or taking while on this medication? (e.g. alcohol)
- > Is there a lower priced brand? Often the same medicine is available more cheaply packaged under a different name by another company.

Using Medicines Safely at Home

Use a "dosette" box: These plastic containers come in different shapes and sizes and have compartments labelled by days of the week and meal times. A dosette enables you to organise the week's medications and prevents uncertainty about whether or not a medicine has been taken. Pharmacists carry them. If you are unsure about

organising tablets, your district nurse or pharmacist may be able to help.

Follow the directions: Follow directions given by the doctor, pharmacist or those on the bottle. Directions should include how much of the medicine to take (e.g. 2 tablets), how often to take it (e.g. once a day), how to take it (e.g. by mouth) and when to take it (e.g. with meals).

Take medicines at the correct time: Some medicines work best on an empty stomach, others should be taken with food. The doctor or pharmacist can advise.

Obey warnings on the label: For example, it is dangerous to drink alcohol or operate machinery while taking many medicines.

Take note of side effects: Make a note of any side effects that occur, such as drowsiness, forgetfulness, confusion or nausea, and discuss these with your family member and/or your doctor.

Keep a record: Make sure you keep a record of what is being taken. Sometimes new drugs are prescribed without the doctor being aware of what other medications the person is on. Taking a newly prescribed drug on top of other tablets can cause serious side effects.

Use a “Medi-list” form, available from your pharmacist, to keep record. It allows you to list all the drugs, when to take them and the dosages. The pharmacist can help you fill it out and keep it up to date. Take it whenever you go to see any health professional (doctor, pharmacist, specialist, dentist etc).

Inform your doctor: Make sure your doctor knows *all* the medications, preparations and supplements being taken and whether these are prescribed by a doctor, bought over the counter or provided by another practitioner.

Label bottles: Make sure bottles are labelled properly. A bottle labelled “as before” or “take as directed” can be dangerous for a person who does not remember the previous instructions.

Keep medicines away from children: Keep medicines in a child-proof cabinet. *Never*

store medications in a container that could be mistaken for something else – use the correctly labelled and dated container. Likewise, don’t use the empty medicine bottles to store other things.

Storage: Read the label to find out how the medicine should be stored. Heat, in particular, can affect medicines.

Lack of response: Go back to the doctor if the medicine does not seem to be working.

Cost of Medicines

Medicines listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) are subsidised by the Commonwealth Government.

If the person you care for has one of a number of concession entitlement cards, they pay \$4.70 for each PBS medication. Ask your pharmacist if they are eligible. If your family member spends more than \$253.80 in a calendar year on medicine, any further prescriptions during that year will be free.

For people without concession cards, PBS medicines cost no more than \$29.50. If a family spends \$960.10 within one year, any further medicines that year will cost no more than \$4.70 each.

To be eligible for the “safety net”, the pharmacist or hospital must list each medicine you buy on a “Prescription Record Form”. You can get a form from your pharmacist. Keep it with the Medi-list and take both lists with you whenever you visit a pharmacy or hospital.

This information is correct as of May, 2006. For up-to-date information, contact your pharmacist, condition-specific support organisation or Centrelink Pharmaceutical Benefits Information: free call 1800 020 613 or visit website: www.centrelink.gov.au.

Contact

Nurse-on-Call

This 24-hour, 7-day service puts you in touch with a registered nurse for professional health information and advice for the cost of a local call. telephone: 1300 60 60