

Prescription Drugs & Older Adults: 5 Tips for Staying Organized

Find ways to help stay on top of prescription drug management for the person in your care.

Many older adults may be taking multiple prescription drugs daily, managing prescriptions for the person you're caring for is no doubt a big part of your role. Filling prescriptions, organizing pills, and often administering medications requires a high level of organization. You want to make sure you're giving medications safely and accurately — and that you have a clear picture of all medications being taken.

5 Tips for Achieving the Best Possible Medication Management

1. Keep an updated list of all medications.

The U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion reports that adverse drug events (including allergic reactions, medication errors and overdoses) cause more than a million ER visits annually. And older patients are twice as likely to visit the ER from one of these events than their younger counterparts. One of the best ways to avoid these complications is to keep a full list of prescriptions as well as over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Note the name of each medication, its strength and dose, specific directions, and other information such as a doctor's recommendations for what food to take with the medication. Keep the list up to date and bring it to all medical appointments for the person in your care. We offer a Care Organizer on [uhc.com/caregiving](https://www.uhc.com/caregiving) that can serve as a handy tool for medication organization.



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2. Use a pill organizer.

Pill organizers can be helpful tools for safely and efficiently dispensing medication. Search online retailers or ask your pharmacist about the best options. Some pill organizers let you sort different medications to be taken at different times. Others have color coding and easy-to-read labeling. This can be helpful if the person in your care has poor eyesight or is showing signs of declining mental cognition. Sitting down together to fill the pill organizer once a week can be a great time to review medication and ask about side effects or concerns.

3. Use one pharmacy.

A pharmacist should be viewed as an essential member of the overall medical team. By using one pharmacy, you reduce the chance of prescription errors. This is because the drug interactions across multiple drugs can be more closely monitored. Another plus of using one pharmacy: You can likely synchronize all prescriptions to be ready for pick-up on the same day. The result? Fewer trips to the pharmacy. (Ask about prescription delivery services or 90-day supplies, too!)

4. Follow a medication reconciliation process.

The Mayo Clinic encourages patients and caregivers to use this safety strategy, which compares the list of medications on file with the person in your care's doctor to the list of medications currently being taken by your care recipient (see tip #1). By conducting a medication reconciliation when new prescriptions are ordered or changed, you prevent dosing errors, interactions, or missing medications.

5. Ask questions and advocate.

Your friend or family member's doctor and pharmacist interact with dozens of patients weekly, so it's important to be a strong voice. You need to advocate for the best interest of the person you're caring for. If it seems like they're dealing with an unreasonable amount of medications, ask about options for safely reducing the number of pills. A doctor or pharmacist may simply be too busy to proactively take this step — unless you bring it up.

Sources:

Adverse drug events

<https://health.gov/our-work/health-care-quality/adverse-drug-events>

Predicting risk of adverse drug reactions in older adults

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4716390/>

Medication errors: Cut your risk with these tips

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/medication-errors/art-20048035>

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