

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
June 18, 2007

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## **HELPING THE ELDERLY SAFELY MANAGE THEIR MEDICATIONS**

The high cost of some medications isn't the only health issue that many elderly face, nor is it the biggest. Medication errors occur at least 1.5 million times a year in the U.S. with adults taking prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and herbal supplements. More than one third of these medication errors involve patients 65 years and older, the highest rate of any age group.

Because the elderly tend to have long-term, chronic illnesses such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, combinations of medications are oftentimes prescribed. Seniors take an average of nearly nine medications a day according to the American Public Health Association.

Common medication-related problems include over-dosage of medication, under-utilization of medication, skipping medication, mixing incompatible medications, and use of unprescribed medication. These medication errors can cause serious harm and even fatalities. A quarter of hospital admissions in the elderly population are due to medication mistakes.

Ellen Martin, R.N., Director of Quality with the Visiting Nurse Association has recommendations for better managing patients' medication regimens to help reduce medication-related problems.

1. Keep a list of every medication you are taking, including over-the-counter and herbal remedies, and keep it up to date. Take the list and a box or bag with all your medications to every medical appointment. It is important to tell your health care provider which medications you are taking and how you are taking them.
2. Always let your primary care physician know when another physician prescribes a new medication for you or if you have any problems with a new medication. If you are thinking of stopping a medication or can't afford to get all your prescriptions filled, discuss it with your physician.
3. Never take another person's prescription medication.

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4. Try to use only one pharmacy for your prescriptions. Your pharmacist can check for adverse drug interactions if he or she knows about all the medications you are taking. Also, you can request that the medication containers have for easy-to-open caps and large print label directions.
5. Use a weekly or daily pill organizer, especially when taking several different medications, to help ensure that you get the right dose at the right time. Establish and follow a regular routine for taking medication. An example might be taking your nighttime pills right after you brush your teeth before bedtime.
6. Keep medications in their original containers, except for those you put in a pill organizer. The labels on medication bottles contain important information, such as correct dosage and expiration dates.
7. Choose one day each year (your birthday is an easy reminder) to check the expiration dates of your medications and throw away expired medications.

Proper management of your medications will not only help prevent adverse reactions that can result from mistakes, but also help ensure that the medications will be effective in treating the conditions they are prescribed for.

Additional information about safe management of medications can be obtained by contacting Ellen Martin, R.N., at (214) 689-2299 or [martine@vnatexas.org](mailto:martine@vnatexas.org).



**Ellen Martin, R.N., reviews with a patient her medication regimen.**

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