

# Using Medications Safely

## A Key Ingredient to Your Health



# Did you Know?

- Over the last decade, older people sought medical treatment or visited the ER more than 35 million times for serious drug events.
  - That is an average of 3.5 million every year.
- Older adults are hospitalized for adverse drug events (ADE's) at a greater rate than the general population is hospitalized for opioids.
- Economic impact
  - 5 million outpatient visits and 280,000 hospitalizations
  - Price Tag: \$3.8 billion
- Often ADE's are underreported.

# Factors Responsible for “America’s Other Drug Problem”

- Increased sensitivity to medications as one ages due to changes in organ systems
- Illnesses often seen with old age also increase sensitivity
- Multiple prescribers
- Self-diagnosis and self-treatment
- Polypharmacy (Rx and OTC)
- Consequences of drug-drug interactions
- Compliance problems – Medicare Part D

# Polypharmacy

- Term used to describe the condition of someone taking multiple medications
  - Often used to describe those individual's who take 5 or more medications.
- Can be helpful or harmful
  - Medication Overload (harmful polypharmacy)

# Medication Overload

- Over the next ten years, it is estimated that there will be at least 4.6 million hospitalizations of older adults and 15 times as many outpatient visits from side effects of medications.
- Reasons for Medication Overload
  - Multiple medications from different providers
  - Providers that may not work in the same network
  - Use of OTC and Herbal Supplement (not reported)
  - Receiving prescriptions from multiple pharmacies.

# Drug-Drug Interactions

- Increased likelihood of clinically significant drug-drug interactions with increased number of medications used
- Increased deaths and hospitalizations associated with drug-drug interactions in the elderly due to decreased reserve capacity

# Most Common Prescription Medications Taken by Older Adults

- Heart Medication
- Blood Pressure Medication
- “Water Pills”
- “Blood Thinners”
- Blood Sugar Medication
- Psychoactive Medication

# Problems Associated with the use of Inappropriate Medications

- Complicate other health problems
- Depression
- Loss of energy
- Poor quality sleep
- Injury to oneself



# Compliance Issues in Older Adults

- The ability to adhere to a prescribed regimen
- Compliance falls with complexity of the regimen and with time
- Reasons medication isn't taken as directed:
  - Cost
  - Confusion
  - Fear of Addiction
  - Feeling Better
  - Wrong Time
  - Taking too much
  - Borrowing

# “The New Normal”

- 90% of people in the U.S. over the age of 65 take at least one drug.
- 42% of people in the U.S. over the age of 65 take five or more drugs
- At least 18% of people in the U.S. over the age of 65 take ten or more drugs per month.

# Strategies for Improving Safety of Medication Use

- Communication – Two Way
  - Seven Questions to Ask Your Physician and Your Pharmacist
    - What is the name of the medication?
    - What is it being prescribed for?
    - How is it to be taken?
    - How long is it to be taken?
    - What are the common side-effects?
    - How much does it cost?
    - Is there a generic equivalent available?

# Strategies for Improving Safety of Medication Use

- Single prescriber
- Single pharmacy
  - Get to know your pharmacist
  - Request consultation for every prescription
    - New or refill
  - Check your medication before leaving the pharmacy
  - Ask questions
  - Take your meds (in bottles) with you to each and every doctor visit.

# Inform Your Physician About All Medications You Take

- Prescription Medications
- Non-prescription Medications
- Herbal/Alternative Remedies
  - Buyer beware

# Strategies for Improving Safety of Medication Use

- Use a medication container (pill box)
- Use a calendar
- Annual “Brown Bag” Medication Review
  - Prescription, Non-prescription and herbals/alternative
- Keep an updated list of all of your medications on your person at all times

# Opioid Use in Older Adults

Your healthcare provider could prescribe these for following reasons

- To treat an injury
- Chronic pain management
- Cancer pain treatment
- Post surgical pain management

The side effects commonly seen with opioid use can be concerning for some older adults.

# Opioid Use in Older Adults

Questions to ask your healthcare provider about opioids

- Why might I need opioid treatment?
- Are there any other pain management options I can try?
- What are the side effects of opioids I should be aware of?
- What are the signs of possible dependence on, or increased tolerance to opioids?
- How long do I need to take opioids?
- Is there anything I should avoid while taking opioids (alcohol, other meds, supplements etc.)



# OK I'm Ready

- Resources for individuals with Opioid Use Disorder
  - OK I'M READY
    - [Okimready.org](http://Okimready.org)
- Safe Disposal of unused medications
  - Local Drug Take-Back Program
  - Take medications back to your provider

*Thank you!*

**Don't forget to check out our website  
for upcoming classes**

**[www.ohai.org](http://www.ohai.org)**

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