

# SAFE MEDICATION USE FOR OLDER ADULTS

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,  
AND CAREGIVERS



## READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- Why it is Important to Understand and Know How to Manage your Medications.
- The Different Types of Medications.
- Medication Management Strategies.



**Sinai  
Health**

Healthy Ageing  
and Geriatrics

# WHAT IS MEDICATION MANAGEMENT?

---

As people grow older, they are more likely to develop long-term health conditions that require taking multiple medications. This means they are more likely to take multiple over-the-counter medications, vitamins, or supplements.



Read this pamphlet if you or someone you care for is older and takes medications. The information here can help avoid overmedication and harmful drug reactions.

## WHAT ARE ISSUES WITH MANAGING MEDICATIONS AS WE AGE?

---

- As people age, they are more likely to be prescribed more than one kind of prescription medication. This places older adults at higher risk of overtreatment, potential drug interactions, and harmful side effects.
- It is estimated that 40% of older Canadians are currently taking one inappropriate medication, while 12% are taking multiple inappropriate medications.
- Our bodies change as we age. These changes can alter the way medications work in our bodies. This means the same dose can become too strong, and not even indicated, over time.
- Many older Canadians face declining eyesight, grip strength, mobility and memory - all of which can affect safe medication use.
- Financial concerns may prevent older adults from accessing medically necessary and appropriate medications.

# TYPES OF MEDICATIONS

---

Not all medications are the same. There are three basic types:



## **PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS:**

These are prescribed by a doctor or nurse practitioner and filled at a pharmacy. Prescription medications can be either “generic” or “brand name.”



## **OVER-THE-COUNTER (OTC) MEDICATIONS:**

These are sold without a prescription. They include Aspirin<sup>®</sup>, laxatives, cough & cold medicines, pain relievers, sleeping aids, and others.



## **COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE HEALTH PRODUCTS:**

These may include:

- Vitamin and Mineral Supplements
- Herbal and Plant-Based Remedies
- Traditional Medicines like Traditional Chinese Medicines or Ayurvedic (Indian) Medicines
- Omega-3 and Essential Fatty Acids
- Probiotics
- Homeopathic Medicines

# STRATEGIES TO BETTER MANAGE YOUR MEDICATIONS

---

## Read the Prescription Label:

- Check the prescription label and look in the bottle to make sure the pharmacist has given you the right amount and the right dose. Ask your pharmacist for large print labels on your medications if you have vision problems. Your pharmacist may be able to print labels in your language of choice, so ask them about this as well.



## Follow Instructions:

- Take your medications exactly as directed by your health care providers. Be sure you understand how, when, and for how long you should take these medications.



## Ask Before Taking an OTC or a Non-Prescription Health Product:

- OTC drugs and supplements may interact with your prescription medications, or contain substances that could cause other problems. Always check with your health care provider or pharmacist before taking any new OTC drug or supplement.



## Make a List:

- Make a list of all the medications you take. Include the names, their doses, and how often you take them. Include all OTC medications, vitamins, supplements, and alternative health products. Be sure to update this list every time anything changes and share it with all of your health care providers and caregivers. Bring your updated medication list or medications with you to your appointments. This can allow your health care providers to know exactly what you are taking.



## Ask Questions:

Ask the following questions to your health care provider or pharmacist about any medications they suggest you take:



- Will it work safely with other medicines I am taking?
- What is the purpose of the drug?
- When and how should I take this new drug?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- What side effects or warning signs should I watch for?

## DOs and DON'Ts of Medication Management:





- **Do** return expired medications to your pharmacy for proper disposal.
- **Do** make a list of your medications.
- **Do** ask questions.
- **Do** keep your prescriptions filled so you don't run out.
- **Do** use a pillbox, dosette or blister packs to help you remember when to take medications.
- **Don't** take medications that are not prescribed for you and always ask about over-the-counter medicines as they may interact with your prescribed medications.
- **Don't** use medication that has expired.
- **Don't** stop taking a medication just because you feel better. Ask your health care provider before stopping any medication.

# MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

## TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

---

If you are caring for an older adult that needs help managing their medications, consider the following tips:

- To minimize treatment interruptions, you can order prescriptions and schedule regular medication refills at your pharmacy, or arrange to get them delivered to you. 
- Beware of interactions. Some medications can interact with other medications, food, alcohol and cause dangerous side effects. It's important to share the complete medication list of the person you are caring for with all of their health care providers. 
- Pay attention to side effects. If you notice any changes in how the person you are caring for is feeling, thinking or behaving, tell the prescribing health care provider or pharmacist right away. Side effects can be a sign that a serious reaction to a drug or combination of drugs may be occurring, and should not be ignored. 
- Make sure that no one else takes your family member's medication. All medications should be stored safely and kept away from children and older adults with serious memory problems.
- In addition to keeping all medications in a safe place, check if any medications may need to be refrigerated as well.
- Ask questions. Your loved one's pharmacist or health care provider can provide additional helpful tips on how to manage medications for older adults. 



## **RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES**

---

- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age

### **ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:**

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Memory Problems
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Living Longer, Living Well: Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease And Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Depression
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

### **ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:**

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit [www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation](http://www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation) for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.



This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

**We would like to thank the following for their support of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing Initiative:**



**The Ben and  
Hilda Katz  
Foundation**



Mon Sheong Foundation and the Ben and Hilda Katz Foundation have generously provided funding to support printing and translation of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing.

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility supported this initiative with funding through its Seniors Community Grant Program.