



Safe Use of Over-the-Counter Medications for Seniors



Medications can play an important role in helping seniors improve or maintain their health. It is particularly important to understand and practice safe use of over-the-counter medications as well as prescription drugs. Medications can pose a risk to seniors' health and safety – even if you only use them occasionally.

Over-the-counter medications include non-prescription products for a cold, pain or discomfort (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen), upset stomach, diarrhea or constipation, or bladder problems.

Risks of over-the-counter medications

These medications can result in temporary health issues such as:

- Falls
- Confusion
- Memory loss
- Decreased concentration
- Depression

They can also aggravate existing medical conditions such as:

- Heart conditions
- Diabetes
- Dementia
- Balance problems

How can you minimize risks?

Be informed. Have your pharmacist review all of your medications with you **every 6 months** to make sure they work together, including:

- over-the-counter medications
- topical creams, vitamins, supplements; and
- those prescribed in a walk-in clinic, the emergency room and/or another physician

Use only one family physician and pharmacy. They need to keep track of which medications you take and identify any possible risks or harmful interactions.

Know when and how to take your medicines. A system such as a dosette or blister pack may be helpful. Ask your pharmacist or health care provider what is right for you. Never combine different medications in the same bottle.

Keep a record. Keep an up-to-date list of your medications, including over prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins and supplements. Share this list with your doctor and pharmacist. Keep a copy:

- in your wallet/purse
- on your fridge in case of an emergency, so emergency personnel will know what medications you take.

Dispose of medicines properly. At least once a year, go through all of your medicines. Dispose of all that are old, expired, or that you no longer take.