

**POISON**  
**Help**<sup>®</sup>  
1-800-222-1222



# Safe Medicine Use & Poison Prevention Tips

A Guide for Older Adults  
and Caregivers

[PoisonHelp.hrsa.gov](https://PoisonHelp.hrsa.gov)



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
**HRSA**  
Health Resources and Services Administration

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**If a medicine was not taken as directed, or if too much medicine was taken by accident, call:  
Poison Help (1-800-222-1222)**

**Poison Help**

- Connects you to a nurse, pharmacist, or other poison expert at your local poison center.
- Is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Is a free phone service.
- Offers bilingual or translation services.

Call 911 if someone has trouble breathing, trouble waking up, seizures, or other life-threatening signs.

**GENERAL TIPS  
For Using Medicine Safely**

It is important to know as much as possible about your medicines to prevent poisonings.

**Know Your Medicines**

- Know the names, reason for use, and possible side effects.
- Review all your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist. Do this at least once a year, or when you start using a new medicine.
- Know how and when to use your medicine, how much to use, and for how long. Never use more medicine than prescribed. Using more does not mean you will get better faster. Also, using too much medicine can poison you.

**Keep a Current Medicine List**

- Bring a list of all the medicines you are using to your doctor's appointments.
- This includes all prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

**Keep All Medicines Locked Up  
and Out of Children's Reach**

- No container can promise to be child proof.
- Store your medicines in a safe place so that children cannot get to them. This will prevent accidental poisonings.

**Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222) If You Think:**

- A medicine was not taken as directed.
- Too much medicine was taken by accident.



## **TIPS** **For Using Prescription Medicine Safely**

- Do not share your medicine.
- Use only medicine that is prescribed for you. Check the label before using it to make sure it is for you.
- Know why you are using each medicine.

## **TIPS** **For Using Over-the-Counter Medicine Safely**

Common over-the-counter (OTC) medicines include pain relievers, cold medicines, laxatives to cause a bowel movement, and antacids for heartburn. Many of these can cause problems when used with other medicine. To prevent problems, you should:

### **Read the Drug Facts Label**

Pay attention to what is listed under Active Ingredients—its name, what it does, and how much is in each pill or teaspoon (5ml). These are parts of the medicine that make it work. For more information about the Drug Facts label, visit [www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome](http://www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome).

### **Compare the Active Ingredients**

Make sure the active ingredients are not the same for two or more medicines that you are using. Too much can harm you.

### **Check With Your Pharmacist or Doctor**

Know what OTC medicines to avoid using with your prescription medicines.

## **TIPS** **For Caregivers**

Here are some things that you can do to help older adults use medicine safely:

### **Keep a Current Medicine List**

This includes all prescription medicines, OTC medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

### **Plan Ahead to Refill Prescriptions On Time**

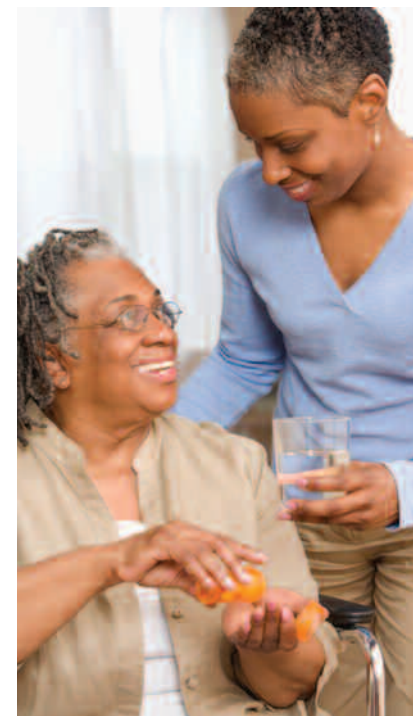
Get prescriptions refilled early to avoid running out of medicine. Make sure the right medicine is being used at the right time, in the right amount, and the way it is prescribed.

### **Prevent Bad Interactions Between Medicines**

Tell health care professionals about all medicines the older adult is using. The information is important to share before a new medicine is prescribed.

### **Work with a pharmacist or doctor to make it safe for older adults to use medicine correctly.**

Read some useful tips on the next page.



## Potential Medicine Problems for Older Adults

## What Caregivers Can Do to Help

### Swallowing tablets or capsules

Ask the pharmacist if the medicines are available in chewable or liquid forms.

### Keeping track of how and when to use medicine, how much to use, and for how long

Ask a pharmacist or doctor to help you develop a medicine-taking plan that fits the older adult's daily routine. Useful reminders include:

- taking medicine at a set time of day
- setting a timer
- placing pill bottles in a central location away from children's reach
- posting a medicine list on the refrigerator
- using a pill box

*NOTE: It is best to keep all medicines in their original and labeled containers. Be careful when you use a pill box to keep doses organized.*

### Reading labels on prescription medicine and OTC products

Ask if the pharmacist can provide prescription labels in large print. Use of a magnifying glass or reading glasses may also be helpful.

### Clearly hearing health care professionals

Ask doctors, nurses, and pharmacists to speak louder and slower.

### Remembering instructions from health care professionals

Ask doctors, nurses, and pharmacists to write down important information.

### Opening bottles

- Ask for large, easy-open bottle tops for prescription medicines. Be sure these are kept out of children's reach.
- Look for OTC packages labeled for homes without small children—they have easy-open closures.

### Handling eye drops, inhalers or injections

Assist older adults in taking their eye drops, inhalers, or injections. These activities require fine motor skills.

### Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222):

If a medicine was not taken as directed, or if too much medicine was taken by accident.

### Call 911:

If someone has trouble breathing, trouble waking up, seizures, or other life-threatening signs.



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**Poison Help is a free phone service connecting callers to their local poison center.**

When accidents happen with medicine or chemicals, call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222). Get help right away from a nurse, pharmacist, or other poison expert. If someone has trouble breathing, trouble waking up, or other life-threatening signs, call 911 right away.

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