

Polypharmacy

An Overview



WHAT IS POLYPHARMACY?

Polypharmacy is defined as the concurrent use of multiple medicines either dispensed according to a prescription or bought over-the-counter.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS THAT CAN ARISE DUE TO POLYPHARMACY?

Using multiple medicines concurrently can lead to problems such as the occurrence of unnecessary adverse drug reactions, wastage, improper use, under-use or over-use of medicines.

WHO IS AT RISK?

If you are aged 65 or older, you may be taking one or more medicines prescribed to you by your doctor, as well as products that you can buy over-the-counter (OTC) without a prescription. While such medicines can help maintain health and prevent further illness, taking combinations of drugs means that you can be at risk for unwanted drug interactions, which may result in adverse drug reactions. If you take medicines prescribed by doctors and answer 'yes' to any of the questions below, you can be at increased risk.

- Do you take herbs, vitamins or OTC products?
- Do you have to take medicine more than once a day?
- Do you see different doctors for different conditions?
- Do you use different pharmacies to fill your prescriptions?
- Do you have poor eyesight or hearing?
- Do you live alone?
- Do you sometimes forget to take your medication?

Keep all medication out of reach of children.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM AT RISK?

As long as your doctor monitors your medicines carefully, the benefits can far outweigh the risks. However, if you feel that you are taking too many drugs, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. There are many ways that you and your health care providers can work together to reduce or avoid the risks. Follow the instructions given by your doctor or pharmacist carefully.

SOME SIMPLE TIPS:

- Talk to your doctor about your medicines.
- Tell your doctor if you are taking **any other medication** prescribed by other doctors.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are consuming **non-prescription medicines, OTC medicines or dietary supplements** (herbs, vitamins, etc.).
- Keep a **written record** of your medicines. You can show the record to your doctor at each visit. You should also note any new symptoms or possible side effects you experience as these can help pinpoint the cause of any problems.
- **Consult your doctor or pharmacist** if you have any questions with respect to your medicines.
- **Do not share** your medicines with others or consume medicines belonging to others. They may not be suitable for you.
- Remember - you should **always know what you are taking and why you are taking them.**

I AM TAKING SEVERAL MEDICINES. HOW CAN I REMEMBER TO TAKE THEM ALL?

If you take several medications daily you need to have a **medication schedule**. This will allow you to take your medicines at **regular intervals**

Discard all medication that is outdated or no longer required.

so that the amount of medicine in your body is maintained appropriately. Ask your pharmacist to help you to prepare a medication schedule and update it whenever your medicines change.

It is helpful to have a **memory aid**, for example, a pill-box with easy-to-open compartments for each day of the week and time it has to be taken. You may want to purchase a product that uses an electronic alarm such as a buzzer, flashing light or that vibrates when it is time to take your medicine. Ask your pharmacist for help in choosing the appropriate type of device for your needs.

HOW SHOULD I STORE MY MEDICINES?

You should keep your medicines in their original containers where possible and store them in a cool and dry place.