



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Medications and Falls

Falls are a common cause of injury in older adults. But falls are not a “normal” part of aging. All adults age 65 and older should be checked for fall risk each year.

Sometimes a fall can be caused by medications, or “meds.” Older adults taking four or more meds are more likely to fall. Meds can be prescribed by a healthcare provider, or sold “over-the-counter” at a store. When starting new meds, an older adult should be alert for any changes in thinking, sight or balance. Meds can also make them dizzy or sleepy. Any of these changes could lead to a fall.

One way to prevent falls is to reduce the amount of meds taken by the older adult. But it is unsafe to stop taking prescription meds without first talking to a healthcare provider. Older adults should keep a list of all of their meds in a wallet or purse to share with their healthcare providers at each visit.

It is also a good idea to use only one pharmacy. Then the pharmacist can check to make sure all of their meds are safe to take together. When more than one pharmacy is involved, elders can share their list of meds with the pharmacist when picking up any new medication so they can check to see if they can all be safely taken together. Pharmacists can help older adults know more about their meds and how to take them safely.

Tips to prevent falls from medications

Ask the healthcare provider to review the medication list at every visit.

Talk to the healthcare provider about reducing some of the medications.

Use only one pharmacy for all prescriptions.

Carry a list of all medications and when each is taken to share with the healthcare provider and pharmacist.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Care Partner Information

Common medicines that may cause symptoms that can lead to a fall are listed in the table below. Some of these are prescribed by a healthcare provider. Others are sold “over-the-counter.” Just because something is sold over-the-counter does not mean it is safe for older adults. Some have ingredients that can cause a fall.

Benadryl and sleep aids that use Benadryl are dangerous for older adults, as they can cause confusion and drowsiness. Many of these medications have “P.M.” in the label. As a rule, older adults should avoid any meds that contain Benadryl. Read med labels carefully and ask the pharmacists or another healthcare provider to suggest safer substitutions. Often there are other over the counter drugs that are just as effective, and can be taken safely.

Medications that can cause falls	
Type	Common Use
Antidepressants	Depression
Antihypertensives	High blood pressure
Antipsychotics	Behavioral health problems
Benzodiazepines	Anxiety
Antihistamines	Allergies
Cholinesterase inhibitors	Dementia
Diuretics	High blood pressure or heart failure
Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs	Swelling or Pain
Sedatives and hypnotics	Sleep

Medications can help keep older adults healthy, but should be used with care. Elders should:

- 1) Work closely with their healthcare team
- 2) Keep an up-to-date med list
- 3) Try to get all meds at one pharmacy
- 4) Avoid dangerous drugs such as Benadryl.

By doing so, medication-related falls can be minimized.

Written by: Jane Mohler, NP-C, MPH, PhD University of Arizona Center on Aging

Care Partner Information ~ Tips for Providing Older Adult Care
 Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number U1QHP28721, Arizona Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.