

# ***Safety for the Older Adult Newsletter***

## **TEST YOUR MEDICATION SAFETY IQ**

Medications play a big role in managing health problems. But it's important to use them safely. Take this short quiz to learn more about safe use of the drugs you or your loved one takes. (Answers at bottom.)

### **TRUE OR FALSE**

1. Medications are helpful, so the more, the better!
2. When I buy off-the-shelf drugs, I should check the packaging carefully.
3. If I am taking prescription drugs, it's OK to take any over-the-counter medications.
4. I can ask my pharmacist for a regular cap rather than a childproof lid.
5. Since herbal remedies are natural, they are all safe.
6. Pain medications are just a "band-aid," masking pain but not improving the underlying condition.
7. I should check the label of prescriptions to be sure I have received the correct medication.
8. Physical activity can decrease or even eliminate the need for many medications.
9. My doctors all exchange notes to keep track of my prescriptions.
10. If I am taking medication and start to feel better, I should stop taking my medication right away.

### **ANSWERS TO "TEST YOUR MEDICATIONS SAFETY IQ":**

1. Medications are helpful, so the more, the better!

**False.** It's important to take the exact dosage your doctor prescribes. If you have trouble remembering to take your medication, a container with compartments can help. Or keep track with a chart.

2. When I buy off-the-shelf drugs, I should check the packaging carefully.

**True.** Most medicines today come in tamper-proof packaging, such as a sealed box and bottle. Examine the outside packaging before you make the purchase, and check the inside seal once you get the bottle home.

3. If I am taking prescription drugs, it's OK to take any over-the counter medications.

**False.** Drug interactions can take place even with nonprescription drugs. When you begin a new prescription, find out from your doctor or pharmacist what other medications should be avoided.

4. I can ask my pharmacist for a regular cap rather than a childproof lid.

**True.** You don't have to be a child to have trouble with those childproof lids! If arthritis or other conditions make it difficult to open safety lids, ask your pharmacist for a regular cap. You'll have to request this each time you refill your prescription and be sure to keep all medications out of the reach of children.

5. Since herbal remedies are natural, they are all safe.

**False.** Herbal medications may contain dangerous contaminants, and some can interfere with or cause bad interactions with prescription medications. Some herbal medications can be toxic in large doses. Always tell your healthcare provider about any herbal remedies you are taking.

6. Pain medications are just a "band-aid," masking pain but not improving the underlying condition.

**False.** Some pain relievers also reduce inflammation. And treating the pain of arthritis can allow you to get the kind of exercise that actually improves the condition.

7. I should check the label of prescriptions to be sure I have received the correct medication.

**True.** While pharmacy errors are rare, they do happen. As soon as you receive a prescription, read the label. If you have any questions about the correct drug and dosage, ask your pharmacist.

8. Physical activity can decrease or even eliminate the need for many medications.

**True.** Diabetes, arthritis, heart disease and other conditions often improve with increased exercise. Ask your healthcare provider about an exercise plan that's best for you.

9. My doctors all exchange notes to keep track of my prescriptions.

**False.** If you are seeing two or more doctors at the same time, each provider should know all the medications you are taking, to avoid overmedication and drug interactions. (Print out the "Medication Safety Checklist" from this Lifeline newsletter and take it with you to doctors' appointments.)

10. If I am taking medication and start to feel better, I should stop taking the medication right away.

**False.** You should take your medication for the full length of the prescribed treatment. It is also very important to complete the whole cycle of antibiotics. Also, do not go off a long-term medication without checking with your doctor.

## **MEDICATION SAFETY CHECKLIST**

The more you know about your medications, the more in charge you are of your health! Use this handy three-part form the next time you get a prescription, and save it for future reference.

**1. Before leaving home for a doctor's appointment or the pharmacy, complete this list of all current medications you are taking.**

Prescription Medications I Take Regularly or As Needed  
Name/Usage/Dose Prescribing Physician Date Began

Over-the-Counter Medications I Take Regularly or As Needed (Be sure to include herbs, vitamins and supplements)  
Name/Usage/Dose Date Began

**2. Before leaving your doctor's office, be sure to ask these questions about any prescription you are given:**

1. What is the name of the medicine?

Is this a brand or generic name? -Brand -Generic

Is a generic available? Yes No

2. Why do I need this medicine?

3. When should I take this medicine, and for how long?

4. How should I take this medicine? (For example, with meals? On an empty stomach? With water?)
5. Are there any side effects that could occur from taking this medicine and what should I do if they occur?
6. Will this new prescription work safely with the other medicines I am taking, including over-the-counter medicines and herbal remedies? (Be sure to bring this form to with your medication list to doctors appointments and when filling a new prescription.)
7. Is there any food or drink that I should avoid while taking this medicine?
8. What should I do if I miss a dose or if I take too much medicine at one time?

**3. Before leaving your pharmacy, be sure to ask these questions:**

1. Is there written information about my medicine that you can give me? (Ask the pharmacist to review the most important information with you. Ask if it is available in large print or, if necessary, in a language other than English.)
2. What is the most important thing I should know about this medicine?
3. Will any tests or monitoring be required while I am taking this medicine?
4. Can I get a refill? -Yes - No If so, how many?
5. How should I store this medicine?

**REMEMBER TO CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER REGARDING MEDICATION DIRECTIONS AND SIDE EFFECTS.**

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