



Your Prescription for Medication Safety

Can you remember the last time that you cleaned out your medicine cabinet or tossed old pills? If you are like most people, you probably haven't reached in the back of your medication cabinet in quite some time. However, if you have children or older adults in the home, it is imperative that you take time to be sure that your medication is safe for everyone in the family. Take a look at a few of our tips to get started and keep everyone away from medication dangers.

Clean it out

Try to sweep through your medications at least twice per year. If it works to do this during the spring forward/fall back time changes or during the holidays and then the summer, do whatever it takes to make it a habit. During your medication cleaning time, assure first and foremost that the medications are not expired. It might seem like a frugal move to keep a few leftover pain pills or creams "just in case", most medications experience chemical changes past the expiration date. Your medications might become more or less powerful past that expiration date. Don't chance it; instead, get rid of it.



Check labels and safety tops

Medication errors can have serious, and even fatal, effects. If your aging parent has decreased eye sight, you will want to double check that he can read the labels on the prescription bottles. Misreading a dose, or the name of the medication, can lead to medication errors or overdose. While you are checking labels, take a look at the safety tops as well. If Dad has arthritis, he might not be able to open that secure push-and-twist top. Consider asking your pharmacist for easier open containers to make Dad's day that much easier. However, if Dad has dementia, those safety tops are crucial to his safety. Confused or forgetful aging adults might take double doses of medications and typically do better with set pill reminders.

Sweep the pill boxes

Pill boxes are a convenient way to be sure that your aging parents are taking their prescribed medications. But if you find pill boxes with medications still left inside, dump the meds, wipe out the container, and start over. It can be next to impossible (and unsafe) to attempt to figure out which pill is which medication. After all, small white pills could be aspirin or Vicodin; it isn't safe to guess. When in doubt, dump the box and start over. Remember to check pill boxes in the home and in other convenient places, like your Mom's purse.

Keep your doctor in the loop

Chances are, your aging parent is likely seeing more than one doctor. Between her primary geriatrician, her arthritis specialist, her cardiologist, and her chiropractor, Mom might have pills prescribed from one doctor that the others don't know about. In order for your Mom's care to be comprehensive and in order to eliminate unnecessary medications or side effects, each doctor must know what she is currently taking.

While you are cleaning out the medicine cabinet, write an updated list of all medications and doses. Then, fax the information to each doctor or specialist. Call the nurse at each office to see if there are any medications that could be working against another or causing unnecessary side effects. Most geriatrician offices will offer this service, or partner with a pharmacist, to do thorough medication reviews.

Consider medication management

If you are concerned about keeping Mom's medicine straight, or if Mom is unable to safely manage her own medication doses and times, you should consider medication management services. Caregivers at [Visiting Angels Wayzata](#) are trained to help out with medication reminders and dispensing. With our caregiver in your Mom's home, you don't have to worry about Mom accidentally skipping a dose or doubling up because she could not remember if she took her lunchtime medications or not. Our medication management services can literally be a life saver; plus, it keeps your extra anxiety away.

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