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## TIPS FOR BETTER MEDICATION MANAGEMENT:

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At the Doctor's Office,  
At the Pharmacy,  
and At Home

**As we age, we're often faced with more health conditions that require regular prescription and over the counter (OTC) drug use.** According to pharmaceutical company Pfizer, appropriate medication distribution and use can help older adults live longer, more active lives; however, medication mismanagement can result in serious health risks.



For older adults, the majority of hospitalizations occur because of medication mismanagement. Things like miscommunication between doctor and patient or different doctors prescribing different medications can all lead to medication mishaps.

The good news is the more you know about your medicines, and the more you talk with your health care professionals, the easier it is to avoid medication complications. **In this guide, you'll learn tips to better manage your medication at the doctor's office, at the pharmacy, and at home, helping you lead a happy and healthy lifestyle.**

## Medication Safety and Older Adults

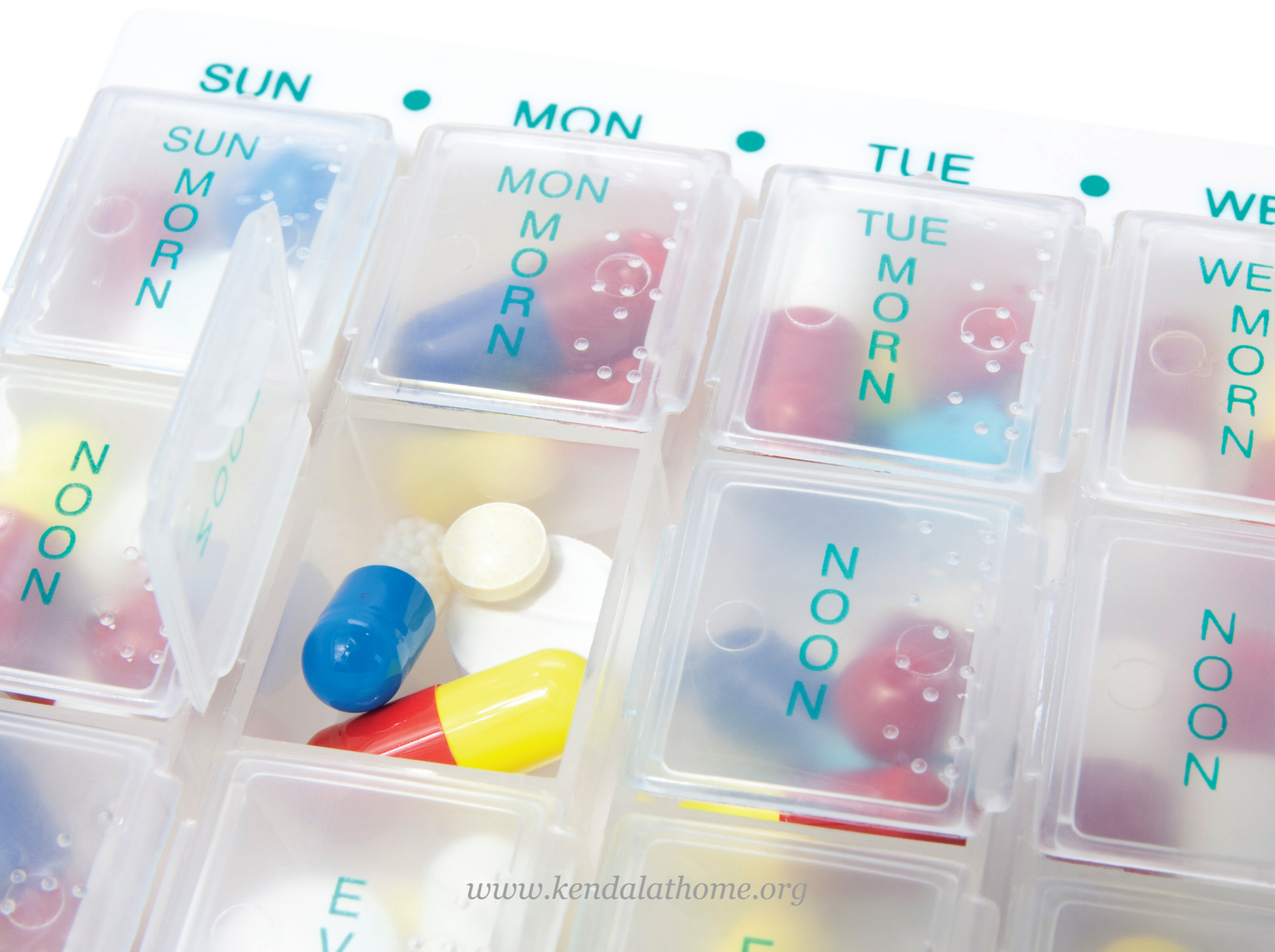
Medication safety is a particular concern for older adults for a number of reasons:

- **It's highly common for doctors to prescribe more than one kind of medicine for older adults, increasing the likelihood of undesirable drug interaction.** If you take nine or more medications, for example, there is a very high likelihood of a drug interaction. According to AARP, older adults take four prescription drugs per day on average, not including OTC medications, vitamins, and supplements. Keep in mind that no matter how small a drug interaction, it still has the potential to be dangerous.





- **Older adults have a greater fat-to-muscle ratio, which affects how drugs and supplements are metabolized.** Because of this, it's possible for older adults to overdose on even the recommended doses for over-the-counter medicines.
- **Medication noncompliance, or failure to follow prescriptions, causes some 125,000 deaths and up to 10 percent of all hospitalizations each year.** Medication noncompliance covers everything from failure to take the correct dosage of medication to not adhering to medication dietary restrictions.



# Get Involved in Your Medication Treatment

**You should be prepared to take an active role in your medication treatment plan to help reduce your risk of medication mismanagement.** If you're seeing multiple physicians, it is impossible for them to know all the medications you're taking.

But getting involved is easier than you think! You can begin by researching **the Beers Criteria**, a list of medications created to help clinicians avoid certain medications where risks generally outweigh the benefits for older adults. You can access the Beers Criteria on the [American Geriatrics Society website](#).

Before you go to your doctor's office, create a list of all the medications including over the counter drugs, vitamins and supplements. If you need assistance, ask a friend or loved one for help. AARP provides a [personal medication record template](#) to help you get started. Provide a copy of the list to each of your doctors, and keep a copy on your person at all times. Post a list on your refrigerator so it is accessible for EMS workers in case of emergency. Update your list every time you begin taking a new medication.



## What if my medication is on the Beers's Criteria?

Just because your medication is listed on the Beers Criteria doesn't necessarily mean it's bad for you. If you're prescribed a medication on the Beers Criteria, remember your doctor has likely done so because the pros outweigh the cons. Don't stop taking your medication because it is on the Beers Criteria. Instead, bring it to the attention of your doctor at your next appointment.

## At the Doctor's Office

✓ Any time your doctor prescribes medication, make sure you understand:



- The name of the medicine (trade name and generic)
- Why you are being prescribed the medicine
- How, when, and for how long you should take the medicine
- If you need any lab tests to monitor your treatment
- Any precautions or warnings about the medicine
- Side effects to watch for
- What to do if side effects occur

Oftentimes, medications come with a long list of possible side effects. Instead of trying to read them all, simply ask your doctor: “What side effects should I be aware of?” If you’re still unclear about what you should expect from a medication, ask “How will I know if this medicine is effective?”

✓ If you are already on a number of medications, also ask:

- If the new medicine has any of the same actions or possible side effects
- If the new medicine might interact with anything you are already taking
- If you still need to take all of your current medication with the new medication

If you are given a new medication without explanation, you should ask “Why am I taking this?”

✓ Do not leave your doctor's office with a new prescription if you:

- Still have unanswered questions
- Didn't hear or understand any of the doctor's answers
- Are unsure you can carry out your treatment plan
- Felt too rushed to address your concerns



## At the Pharmacy

You're only granted so much time with your doctor, so it's imperative you continue asking questions once you arrive at the pharmacy. **There is a reason you're asked if you have any questions for the pharmacist when you pick up a prescription**— they have medication expertise and can educate you on what you are taking. All you have to do is ask.

✓ Ask your pharmacist the following five questions any time you have a prescription filled:

- Is my medication list on file up to date?
- Is there a better or safer alternative to my medicines?
- Are there any generic alternatives to my medicines?
- Can you confirm my doctor's usage directions?
- Is there anything else I should know about my medications?



Before you leave the pharmacy, ensure your medication is packaged in a way you can easily access. (For example, ask for non-childproof caps if you have arthritis.) If the medication you've been given looks different than your usual prescription, ask the pharmacist if the medication is correct. It's unlikely the pharmacy gave you the incorrect prescription – in fact, it's much more likely the pharmacy switched suppliers, but it's always best to ask.

## In the Home

When you arrive home, carefully read medication labels to ensure you understand proper protocol. Then, follow these tips for organizing your medication:



- ✓ **Purchase a Pillbox** – Ask your doctor for or purchase a weekly pillbox or pill organizer. Taking multiple medications throughout the day can be confusing. A pillbox simplifies the process for you, and reduces the risk of medication mistakes. If your pills are still in the day and time slot, you know you haven't taken them.

**There are some pharmacies that will deliver pre-packed medications to older adults' homes for the day, date, and time they are needed.** Ask your physician or local senior center for help locating participating pharmacies.

- ✓ **Store Your Medication Where You Will See It** – If your medication is somewhere out of sight, it will likely be out of mind. With the exception of some liquid medications like antibiotic syrups, most medications should be kept in a cool, dry place. Medications with specific storage guidelines will be clearly labeled with storage instructions.

Kitchen and bathroom counters or bedroom dressers are all good options for keeping your medication. Older adults with adolescent grandchildren or visitors who struggle with drug addiction should keep medication out of reach or in a lock box.

Be consistent with where you store your medicines. If you keep a medication on the counter and in the bathroom, for example, you should either store all medication on the counter or in the bathroom.

- ✓ **Dispose of Unused Medication Properly** – If for any reason you do not use all of your medication by its expiration date, always dispose of it properly. In many cases, you can simply throw your drugs in the household trash, but before you do always take a black, permanent marker and cover your name on the pill bottle before doing so. Check your medication bottle and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website for how to properly dispose of unused medications.

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**Following these tips for better medication management can help you avoid unwanted side effects, dangerous interactions, and allow you to continue to live your best life.**



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