



News Release

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Seniors and Medication Safety

Older adults often need medication for chronic conditions and seniors are taking more medication now than ever before. Recent studies show that the average person over 65 takes between two and seven prescription medications daily.

According to **Dr. James Mowry, Director, Indiana Poison Center**, "The body's processes often slow down as we grow older and this affects the way medications work. This can create a greater risk of drug interactions and side effects. In fact, almost 40 percent of all adverse drug reactions reported each year involve people over the age of 60."

The Indiana Poison Center offers the following tips to seniors for safe use of medication:

- Keep a list of all the medicines you take (and don't forget over the counter medicines). Write down the names of the medicines, the doctor who gave them to you, how much you take and when you take them. Why you take the medicine and when you started taking it is also a good thing to record. Keep one list at home and one in your purse or wallet.
- Review all medications with your doctor or pharmacist at least once a year or whenever you start taking a new medication. Your health care provider(s) should know about all of the medications you take including all prescription, non-prescription, herbal, dietary supplements and any other type of medication.

- Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you drink alcohol or take non-prescription drugs with prescription drugs. Never mix alcohol and medicine unless your doctor says you can. Some medicine may not work as well or may make you sick if taken with alcohol.
- Read and save all of the written information that comes with each medicine.
- Get prescriptions refilled far enough in advance to avoid running out of medication.
- Know what your medications look like. If a prescription refill looks different than before, ask your pharmacist to make sure it's the correct medication. Also, most pharmacies now label the prescription bottle with a description of the pill, such as "peach round tablet, imprint SL 450". You can check the pill against the label to be sure they match.
- Keep all medications in their original containers and store them in a cool, dry place, away from bright light. Unless the label says so, don't store medications in the refrigerator.
- Never mix different medications in the same container.
- Turn on lights, put on your reading glasses and check the label *every time* before you take any medicine to make sure it is the right one.
- Take the *exact amount* at the times your doctor tells you to.
- Discard medication that you are no longer using, if you can't read the label or it's outdated. After the expiration date, the medication may not be effective.
- Call your doctor right away if you have any problems with your medicine.
- Never take anything that has been prescribed for a friend or relative. The same medication may work differently for different people. Take only those prescription drugs that are prescribed for you.
- Don't stop taking medicine unless your doctor says you can – even if you feel better.

- Don't take more or less than you should. Use a measuring spoon – *don't guess*. Never take more than prescribed. Taking more doesn't mean you'll get better faster.
- Always replace child resistant caps carefully.
- Keep a record of all medications you are taking and organize your dosing schedule. If you take several medications, keep a record of them as you take them. Ask your pharmacist or doctor for tips on organizing and keeping track of your medications.
- Take medications at the proper time. They may need to be taken before, after or during meals. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Take your medications for the length of time they are prescribed for, even if symptoms disappear. If you stop taking them too soon, your total recovery may take longer.
- Before you travel, ask if you need to adjust your medication schedule to account for changes in time, routine and diet. When flying, carry your medications in your hand luggage in case checked luggage is lost.
- Keep the number for the Indiana Poison Center near your phones - **1-800-222-1222**.

Over The Counter (OTC) Medications

- Always read the label to find out what the medication is for, how to take it, what the ingredients are, and any warnings or precautions for use.
- Know what types of OTC medications to avoid taking with your prescription medications. When in doubt, ask your pharmacist or doctor – don't guess!
- Select products that will treat only the symptoms you have. Multi ingredient products, such as combination cold remedies, may contain medication for problems you don't have.
- Take the medication *exactly* as stated on the label. Taking too much can be harmful.

- Compare active ingredients before taking more than one OTC product. Many contain the same active ingredient and you may get more than the recommended dose without even knowing it.
- Most nonprescription medications are intended for temporary use. Talk to your doctor if taking an over the counter medication becomes more than a temporary practice.

Protecting Children and Pets

Many of the common prescriptions for older adults pose a great threat for a tragic outcome if taken by a child, or a small animal. Dr. Mowry reminds you that, “Even the most loving grandparents can put grandchildren in danger when they unknowingly overlook simple precautions. It’s essential for grandparents to be familiar with poison prevention procedures.”

- Make sure that medications in purses and suitcases are not available to children.
Children are fascinated by their parent’s and grandparent’s belongings and want to look through them and find things to play with. They may also look for gifts or candy, if you are visiting.
- Be very careful with daily and weekly pill minders, most are not child resistant.
- Keep all medications and household products in the original labeled containers.
- Keep medication and household chemicals **locked away** out of children’s reach.
- Remember that children climb. Putting things on the back of counters or in the middle of the table will not keep them away from kids. Even the top of the refrigerator is frequently accessible to good climbers.

- Remember that **NOTHING is Child-Proof**. Child-resistant containers are designed only to slow young children down – in reality, children can often open the containers very quickly .
- Avoid taking medication in front of young children since they like to imitate adults.
- Only give infants and children over-the-counter medications that are specially formulated for their age and weight.

To learn more about poison prevention call the Indiana Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222**, or visit the Center’s website at www.clarian.org/poisoncontrol. For a poisoning emergency, call the Poison Center experts immediately at **1-800-222-1222**.

The Indiana Poison Center is an independent, non-profit, agency providing coverage and services for the entire state of Indiana. It serves as both an emergency telephone service and an information resource center, with services accessible to the general public and health care professionals 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The IPC is the designated Regional Poison Information Center for Indiana and is certified by the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a collaborative effort of the Indiana State Department of Health, Clarian Health, the Federal Health Resources Services Administration and health care providers throughout the state.