

# Medicine Safety and Seniors

## Medicines to use carefully — or avoid

*As we get older, our bodies can react to medicines differently than they did when we were younger. We often have a greater risk for unwanted side effects. This is especially true when we're taking several different medicines.*

*Use this handout to help you know what medicines to be most careful about — or avoid. If you take any of these medicines, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how to be safe.*

## Medicines

### Pain medicines

- **NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)**  
*Examples:* naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn), indomethacin (Indocin), and long-term use of ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)
- **Other pain medicines**  
*Examples:* oxycodone (Percocet, OxyContin), hydrocodone (Lortab, Norco), morphine (MS Contin), cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril), methocarbamol (Robaxin), carisoprodol (Soma), metaxalone (Skelaxin)

### Mental health medicines

- *Examples:* amitriptyline (Elavil), nortriptyline (Pamelor), paroxetine (Paxil), fluoxetine (Prozac), haloperidol (Haldol), quetiapine (Seroquel), risperidone (Risperdal), olanzapine (Zyprexa)

### Antihistamines (allergy medicines)

- *Examples:* diphenhydramine (Benadryl), chlorpheniramine (AllerChlor), doxylamine (Unisom), dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), and over-the-counter sleep aids (products that have PM in the name).

### Bladder-control medicines

- *Examples:* oxybutynin (Ditropan), tolterodine (Detrol), solifenacin (Vesicare), darifenacin (Enablex), and fesoterodine (Toviaz).

## Why you need to be careful

NSAID medicines can increase your risk of bleeding and can affect your heart and kidneys.

These other pain medicines can cause confusion and drowsiness, leading to falls, broken bones, or hospitalizations.

Many of these medicines can cause dry eyes or mouth, constipation, and urinary retention (inability to urinate).

**Medicines that treat mental health, allergies, and bladder control are a leading cause of falls in older adults.** These medicines can cause dizziness and confusion. This can lead to falls, broken bones, and hospitalizations.

## Medicines

### Heart medicines

- *Examples:* clonidine (Catapres), nifedipine (Procardia), doxazosin (Cardura), amiodarone (Cordarone), disopyramide (Norpace), digoxin (Digitek, Lanoxin)

### Diabetes medicines

- **Long-acting sulfonylureas**  
*Example:* glyburide (Diabeta)

### Stomach medicines

- *Examples:* cimetidine (Tagamet), scopolamine (Transderm Scop), promethazine (Phenergan), dicyclomine (Bentyl)

Avoid use of proton-pump inhibitors for longer than 8 weeks, unless under the direction of a doctor.

- *Examples:* omeprazole (Prilosec), pantoprazole (Protonix), esomeprazole (Nexium).

### Sleep and anxiety medicines

- *Examples:* diazepam (Valium), lorazepam (Ativan), clonazepam (Klonopin), alprazolam (Xanax), temazepam (Restoril), zaleplon (Sonata), eszopiclone (Lunesta), zolpidem (Ambien)

### Hormone medicines

- *Examples:* testosterone (Depo-Testosterone, Androgel), oral estrogens (Estrace, Premarin)

If you have certain health conditions, you may need to avoid other medicines that are not listed here. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have:

- A history of falls or fractures
- Dementia
- Kidney disease
- Heart failure

## Why you need to be careful

These medicines can affect your heart and blood pressure too much, leading to hospitalizations.

This medicine can lower your blood sugar too much, leading to dizziness, falls, or broken bones.

These medicines can interact with other medicines or cause drowsiness.

Long-term use of proton-pump inhibitors may increase risk of bacterial infections or broken bones.

These medicines can cause drowsiness, leading to falls, broken bones, or hospitalizations.

These medicines have several risks including blood clots, heart problems, breast cancer, and endometrial cancer.

### Remember:

- Always talk with your doctor before starting or stopping any medicine, including over-the-counter medicines and herbal supplements.
- Try to fill all your prescriptions at only one pharmacy.
- Use a medicine pillbox and MED card.

Information on this handout comes from the 2015 BEERS Criteria for Health in Aging Foundation's "Ten Medications Older Adults Should Avoid or Use with Caution" via the American Geriatrics Society.