



Preventing Medication – Related Falls

Understanding Drug Side Effects and Fall Risk

Medications are important in treating health problems that accompany aging. Often, older adults take many medications to treat chronic conditions such as arthritis, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

However, prescription and non-prescription medications can have side effects that increase the risk of falling. When taking medications – especially 4 or more – older adults need to be aware of possible risks and take steps to reduce them.

Common Medications for the Following Health Problems May Increase Fall Risk:

- Heart and blood pressure
- Sleep, anxiety, and depression
- Dementia symptoms
- Arthritis and pain
- Bladder control
- Digestive, stomach, and nausea
- Blood clots
- Colds, flu, and allergies

Medication Side Effects that Increase Fall Risk:

- Dizziness, lightheadedness, drop in blood pressure when standing
- Difficulties with balance, slow response to loss of balance
- Loss of concentration, decreased alertness, and drowsiness
- Blurred vision

What You Can Do to Reduce Your Fall Risk:

- Know why you are taking each medication and the proper dosage.
- Always read the label on new medications to be aware of possible side effects and interactions - especially if you take 4 or more.
- Ask for large print labels if you need them, and ask your pharmacist for more information if necessary.
- Take medications as prescribed and follow all directions on the labels.

What You Can Do to Reduce Your Fall Risk (cont.):

- Keep an up-to-date medication list, including those you take on an as-needed basis and those that caused problems in the past.
- Bring all your medications (prescription and over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbal remedies) to your doctor or pharmacist for review - especially if you have fallen or have balance problems.
- Your doctor or pharmacist can help determine if any medications or dosages could contribute to falls and whether any should be stopped or replaced with alternative medications.
- Tell your doctor right away if you notice any side effects after taking a medication (see page 1 for side effects).
- Use the same pharmacy for all prescriptions - it makes it easier to check for problems.
- Avoid drinking alcohol when taking medications - it can affect how they work, worsen side effects, and cause problems with balance.

- If you fall, write down immediately where and when you fell, how you fell, what you were doing, and how you were feeling. Call your doctor to provide this information as soon as you can.

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