



A SENIOR'S GUIDE to the SAFE USE of MEDICATIONS and HERBS

UTEP/UT-AUSTIN
COOPERATIVE PHARMACY PROGRAM



in association with
THE AGELESS HEALTH INITIATIVE OF
THE PASO DEL NORTE HEALTH FOUNDATION



To obtain portable medication records or an informational booklet entitled **"A Senior's Guide to the Safe Use of Medications and Herbs,"** contact us at the UTEP/UT-Austin Cooperative Pharmacy Program, or visit us at our "Herbal Safety" website at www.herbalsafety.utep.edu.
1100 N. Stanton, Suite 301 El Paso, TX 79902, 915-747-8519

What is polypharmacy?

The word **polypharmacy** literally means "many drugs." It refers to the use of several different medications at the same time, in the same person.

What is polyherbacy?

Polyherbacy means taking more than one product containing herbs. Nutritional supplements are often included in this category, and they usually refer to products such as vitamins and minerals.

Why should you be concerned about polypharmacy and polyherbacy?

- It can be challenging to carefully follow dosing instructions for several different medicines and/or herbal products.
- There is an increased chance that side effects will occur as a result of taking several drugs and/or herbs.
- Negative interactions can occur between drugs, herbal products, foods and drinks.
- There is an increased chance that medication errors can occur if you are taking several different medications and/or products.
- The normal aging process changes the way that drugs are "handled" by the body. As a result, drugs are more likely to build-up or accumulate and potentially cause toxic effects in older adults.

What can you do to decrease your risk of adverse effects of polypharmacy and polyherbacy?

Keep a list of all of the medications (prescription and over-the-counter), herbal products and supplements that you are currently taking! Write down names of the products, doses, how often you take them, what you take them for, when you started taking them and who prescribed them. Keep this list handy at all times.



Use the same pharmacy for all your medication needs! It is important to build a relationship with a pharmacist who can keep an accurate record of all of the medications that you are taking and then check for important interactions when you get new prescriptions filled.

Follow directions! Not following dosing directions can lead to serious effects with certain medications. If you are not sure about how a medication should be taken, ask your doctor or pharmacist!

Pay attention to symptoms that may be side effects of your new medications! If this occurs, talk with your doctor or pharmacist to see if this is due to your new medication or a combination of medications and/or herbs that you are taking.

Communicate effectively with your health care providers! Bring a current list of everything you take to your healthcare visits so that your provider can update their records. Writing down specific questions that you may have about your medications ahead of time will help you focus on specific issues and maximize your time during visits.

Get rid of expired or unnecessary medications, supplements or herbal products! Most drugs lose potency after they have expired and may no longer be effective, while a few drugs may potentially become toxic after the expiration date. In addition, keeping drugs that you no longer need can lead to confusion and medication-related problems.



Schedule an appointment with your physician or pharmacist! Throw all of the medications, herbal products, and supplements that you take into a bag and make an appointment to review them with your doctor or pharmacist.

Self-educate before you self-medicate! There are a variety of non-prescription over-the-counter (OTC) medications that are safe treatment options for certain conditions, but these products can cause drug interactions and side effects with other medications, supplements or herbal products that you are taking. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if a specific OTC product is appropriate and safe for you to take!

Remember: Just because a product is "natural," doesn't mean that it is safe!