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Ten Medications Older Adults Should Avoid or Use with Caution

Because older adults often experience chronic health conditions that require treatment with multiple medications, there is a greater likelihood of experiencing unwanted drug side effects. Older people can also be more sensitive to certain medications. To help you make better informed decisions about your medications, and to lower your chances of overmedication and serious drug reactions, the American Geriatrics Society Health in Aging Foundation recommends that older people be cautious about using the following types of medications, including some that can be purchased without a prescription (over-the-counter).

▶ **If you are taking any of these medications, talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist.**

▶ **Do not stop taking any medication without first talking to your healthcare provider.**

Medication

Reasons

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

USE WITH CAUTION

Used to reduce pain and inflammation.
AVOID regular, long-term use of NSAIDs

- When good alternatives are not available and NSAIDs are necessary, use a proton pump inhibitor such as omeprazole (Prilosec) or misoprostol (Cytotec) to reduce bleeding risk.
- Use special caution if you are at higher risk of developing bleeding stomach ulcers. Those at higher risk include people more than 75 years old, people taking oral steroids, and people taking a blood-thinning medication such as apixaban (Eliquis), aspirin, clopidogrel (Plavix), dabigatran (Pradaxa), edoxaban (Savaysa), rivaroxaban (Xarelto), or warfarin (Coumadin).
- Also use special caution if you have kidney problems or heart failure.

NSAIDs can increase the risk of bleeding stomach ulcers. They can also increase blood pressure, affect your kidneys, and make heart failure worse.

Aspirin (for certain people - see below)

USE WITH CAUTION

Used to prevent heart attacks and strokes

- If you have NEVER had heart problems or a stroke, the harms of aspirin can outweigh its benefits.
- If you HAVE had heart problems or stroke, aspirin is usually recommended to prevent future heart problems or strokes.
- Talk with your healthcare provider if aspirin is right for you.

Aspirin can increase the risk of stomach bleeding.

Digoxin (Lanoxin)

USE WITH CAUTION

Used to treat heart failure and irregular heartbeats.

- For most older adults, other medications are safer and more effective.
- Avoid doses higher than 0.125 mg per day. Higher doses increase toxicity and provide little additional benefit.
- Be particularly careful if you have moderate or severe kidney problems.

It can be toxic in older adults and people whose kidneys do not work well.

Medication

Reasons

Certain Diabetes Drugs

USE WITH CAUTION

- Glyburide (Glynase), glipizide (Glucotrol), glimepiride (Amaryl), gliclazide.

These can cause dangerously low blood sugar.

AVOID Muscle Relaxants

- Such as cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril), methocarbamol (Robaxin), carisoprodol (Soma), and similar medications.

They can leave you feeling groggy and confused, increase your risk of falls, and cause constipation, dry mouth, and problems urinating. Plus, there is little evidence that they work well.

AVOID Certain Medications used for Anxiety and/or Insomnia

- Benzodiazepines, such as diazepam (Valium), alprazolam (Xanax), and chlordiazepoxide (Librium).
- Sleeping pills such as zaleplon (Sonata), zolpidem (Ambien), and eszopiclone (Lunesta).

They can increase your risk of falls, as well as cause confusion. Because it takes your body a long time to get rid of these drugs, these effects can carry into the day after you take the medication.

AVOID Certain Anticholinergic Drugs

- Antidepressants amitriptyline (Elavil) and imipramine (Tofranil).
- Anti-Parkinson drug trihexyphenidyl (Artane).
- Irritable bowel syndrome drug dicyclomine (Bentyl).

They can cause confusion, constipation, dry mouth, blurry vision, and problems urinating (in men).

AVOID Certain Over-the-Counter (OTC) Products

- AVOID products that contain the antihistamines diphenhydramine (Benadryl) and chlorpheniramine (AllerChlor, Chlor-Trimeton). These medications are often included in OTC remedies for coughs, colds, and allergies.
- AVOID OTC sleep products, like Tylenol PM, which contain antihistamines such as diphenhydramine.

Although these medications are sold without a prescription, they are not risk-free. They can cause confusion, blurred vision, constipation, problems urinating, and dry mouth.

AVOID Estrogen Pills and Patches

- Typically prescribed for hot flashes and other menopause-related symptoms.

They can increase your risk of breast cancer, blood clots.

If you are NOT being treated for psychosis

USE WITH CAUTION

- Use antipsychotics such as haloperidol (Haldol), risperidone (Risperdal), or quetiapine (Seroquel) WITH CAUTION. These medications are commonly used to treat behavioral problems in older adults with dementia.

They can increase the risk of stroke or even death in older adults with dementia. They can also cause tremors and other side effects, as well as increase your risk of falls.



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The AGS Health in Aging Foundation is dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older people. We aim to empower older adults and caregivers to actively participate in their health care and decision-making.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. April 2023

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