Senior Medication Safety Questions & Checklist

Older people as a group tend to have more long-term, chronic illnesses such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease than any other age group. Because they may have a number of health problems or issues at the same time, it is common for older people to take many different drugs. If your doctor prescribes a medication for your condition, try to find out as much about it as you can, including how to take it properly. Ask the following questions and write down the answers before leaving the doctor's office. Improper use has the potential to cause serious injury.

Understanding Your Medication
- What is the name of the condition this medicine will treat?
- What is the name of the medicine?
- How does it treat my condition?
- Did you check that it doesn’t contain anything I’m allergic to?
- How long will I have to take it? How long will it take to work?
- How should I store the medication? Does it need to be refrigerated?
- Can the pharmacist substitute a less expensive, generic form of the medicine?
- Is there written information about the medicine? Is it available in large print or other languages?

How To Take Medication
- Should I take it as needed or on a schedule?
- Should I take it at a certain time of day?
- How much should I take each time?
- Do I need to take it with food?
- What foods, drinks, other medicines, dietary supplements or activities should I avoid while taking this medication?
- May I drink alcohol while on this medication?

What to Expect with the Medication
- How will I feel once I start taking this medicine?
- How will I know if this medicine is working?
- If I forget to take it, what should I do?
- What side effects might I expect? Should I report them?
- Can this medicine interact with other prescription and over-the-counter medicines -- including herbal and dietary supplements -- that I am taking now?

Tips for Taking Medication Properly
- Check the label on your medicine before taking it to make sure that it is for the correct person -- you.
- Read and save any written information that comes with the medicine.
- Take the medicine according to the schedule on the label.
- Don't take more or less than the prescribed amount of any medicine.
- If swallowing tablets is difficult, ask your doctor or pharmacist whether there is a liquid form of the medicine or whether you could crush your tablets. However, do NOT break, crush, or chew tablets without asking a health professional first.
- Get into the habit of checking the expiration dates on your medicine bottles, and throw away medicine that has expired.
- Try to set and follow a routine for taking your medicines.

Questions derived from the NIHSeniorHealth.gov