

5 Must-Do Rules for Preventing Medication Mistakes

How to protect yourself in advance from drug interactions

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If 1.5 million serious [medication mistakes](#)^[1] happen every year, and 100,000 people die from them, how do you make sure you and your loved ones aren't among the casualties? Take these five steps to make sure medication mistakes don't happen to you.

1. Be prepared.

Make a list of prescription drugs, nonprescription drugs, and any supplements such as vitamins, minerals, or herbs that you and your family members are taking. Keep a copy in your wallet, and update it regularly.

2. Have regular medication reviews.

At least once a year, have your general practitioner or primary doctor review your list of medications to make sure there are no dangerous combinations, incorrect dosages, or medications inappropriate for your age and circumstances. Remember, as time goes by, your body changes, and a medication that was perfectly fine five ^[2]years ago may not be healthy -- or even necessary -- today.

Another possibility, suggests Anne Meneghetti, M.D., director of Clinical Communication for Epocrates, a medication management system for doctors, is what she calls "brown-bagging it." Load everything you or your family member is taking -- including medications, vitamins and minerals, and herbal supplements -- into a bag and bring it to the doctor's office. With the actual vials and labels in front of her, the doctor will have better information.

3. Take advantage of pharmacy consults.

At the pharmacy, ask for (or accept, if it's offered automatically) a consultation with the pharmacist. Sometimes pharmacists are easier to talk to than doctors, and they can explain whether the drug should be taken alone or with meals and what side effects you need to be alert for. Pharmacists are

also highly knowledgeable about medication interactions, so if you have a chance, ask the pharmacist to review your list of medications as a safety check.

4. In the hospital, be proactive both prior to and after surgery.

Prior to surgery, ask if there's anything you need to stop taking, and how soon before surgery you should stop. Afterward, when doctors and nurses come around to administer medication, ask them (assuming you're conscious) to explain what drugs you're being given and what effect they're meant to have. If you're not going to be conscious for a length of time and you have someone accompanying you, ask him or her to do this for you.

5. Go home prepared to follow up.

During the hospital discharge process, ask to be sent home with a list of all the medications you were given during your stay, plus those that you'll be taking home with you. Have your regular doctor or nurse go over them with you to make sure you understand how they should be taken.

Links

1. <http://www.caring.com/articles/medication-mistakes-that-can-kill>
2. <http://www.caring.com/>

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