

RX for Medication Management



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THE SITUATION

Taking medications is a daily ritual for most people, and it is not one that should be taken lightly. Proper dosage, suitable storage and following other directions can avoid serious consequences. For safety's sake, keep these strategies in mind:

THE SOLUTION

- ▶ **Get to know your pharmacist.** It is often best to select one pharmacy for all your medication needs so that your records, including allergies and past adverse reactions, are in one place and the pharmacist can see a total picture of a person's health. Factor into your decision whether the store's operating hours fit your needs. Consider your pharmacist, like your physician, a resource when you have concerns, require additional information, or have questions about the cost of medication, including Medicare prescription drug plans. And ask if you need specific assistance, such as non-child proof caps, enlarged type on prescription labels or even home delivery.
- ▶ **Know the fine print about medications.** Read the medication's label, directions and information insert. These contain important instructions, such as foods to avoid and potential side effects. Ask questions about a medication's usage; for example, should it be taken at a certain time of day? Inquire about interactions of drugs with: other drugs, including over-the-counter drugs like antacids and cough medicine; foods and beverages; and certain medical conditions. If a person has swallowing difficulties, find out whether pills or capsules can be crushed or mixed with food without altering their effectiveness or if the medication comes in other forms, such as liquid formulations or a time-release patch.
- ▶ **Keep everyone informed.** Maintain a master list, including all prescription and over-the-counter drugs, and vitamins, minerals and herbal supplements; dosages; and the prescribing physician's name and phone number. Also, keep a log of the medication's responsiveness to specific symptoms and any poor reactions, such as weight loss or agitation. Share this information with all treating physicians, pharmacists and any other caregivers, and have it handy in case of emergency.
- ▶ **Store medications properly.** Keep medications in a cool, dry place. Avoid bathroom cabinets because the warm, moist air may cause the medications to break down. Toss out expired drugs. If your loved one can

no longer manage medications, make sure all drugs are kept out of reach or locked up. If you suspect an overdose, immediately call poison control or 911, and never induce vomiting.

- ▶ **Stick to a specific regimen.** Take medications as part of a daily routine, such as eating breakfast. If your loved one resists, drop the subject and attempt again after a short time or try a different approach. It is important that medications maintain a steady flow in the bloodstream so do not alter or skip a dose or double up if a prescribed amount is missed without direction from a healthcare professional.
- ▶ **Use management tools.** To keep on schedule, use visual aids like a daily calendar, chart or reminder notes. Consider a medication organizer—divided plastic containers, single dose pouches or automatic pill dispensers—that separates pills by time of day and/or day of the week. Avoid confusion by writing each person's name on any storage tools and separating medications from those of other members of the household. Watches, pagers, alarms and other gadgets can be set as reminders; however, monitor that these devices do not cause agitation or confusion, especially for individuals with dementia.
- ▶ **Intervene, if necessary.** If your loved one appears to be having difficulty with self-administration, it may be time for serious assessment and intervention. Try to involve the person in any decisions, if possible, so he or she feels a part of the process. Someone—you, a neighbor or a home health agency employee, for example—may need to call each day to ask if medications have been taken or to physically manage and administer them. It's best to coordinate care and make medication management a social connection.

— JESSIE OSBORNE

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Maintain a checklist of medications and store it in two places—for example, one on the refrigerator door and one in a wallet. Periodically perform audits of medication usage, noting the fill date and doses remaining so that you refill prescriptions on time.