

High Risk Medicines for Older Adults



Aging affects how medicines work.

As our bodies age, they absorb and process medicines more slowly than at younger ages. Older adults need lower doses of medicines than younger adults. Some medicines must be used with more caution and require frequent checks with your doctor or nurse. Some very high risk medicines should be used only when there is no better way to treat a medical condition.

Know the facts about each medicine you take:

- The name
- What it's for
- The correct dose, how often, and when to take it
- Expected benefit
- Possible side effects
- When to call and report a side effect

Possible side effects to watch for

When you take any medicine, be sure to take it just as prescribed. Check the directions on the label before you leave the pharmacy. If they are not clear, *ask your pharmacist*.

Watch for possible side effects that could cause a fall or other accident, such as:

- Changes in vision or awareness
- Loss of balance
- Fainting or passing out
- Muscle weakness
- Feeling tired, sleepy, or dizzy
- Lower alertness or trouble staying focused
- Memory problems

Be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist:

- **Could this medicine** increase my risk of falling or create danger if I drive?
- **Is it safe** to use my medicines together, including over-the-counter vitamins, herbs, cold medicines, or pain relievers?
- **Are there any foods or drugs** such as alcohol that I should NOT use when I take my medicines?

Certain medicines or their side effects can ↑ the chances of causing a fall, a driving accident, or other problems.

Below are groups of medicines that can cause serious problems. **This is not a complete list.** Check with your doctor about how to take *your* medicines and possible side effects.

- **Opioid** or narcotic pain medicines
- **Anti-anxiety** medicines
- **Sleep aids** – both prescription and over-the-counter
- **Muscle relaxing** medicines
- **Mood-stabilizing** medicines

If you have concerns about your medicines, talk with your doctor.

Do NOT just stop taking a medicine your doctor has prescribed for you. Talk with them first. Medicine is prescribed to improve your health. If side effects occur or you have concerns about a medicine, let your doctor know. They can likely offer a good solution.

