

Alliance

Handshake

April 2014

Medication errors are too common, with the administration of drugs accounting for 38 percent of errors. At least 7,000 deaths annually are blamed on medication errors.

There are many options on the market for medication organization system. Deciding which one is right for you needs to be the driving force behind the system you ultimately choose. Most of us are familiar with pill organizer boxes with various slots for time of day and days of the week. There are other options that can be just as effective when implemented consistently.

We recommend that you consider some of the following methods when considering a system to organize your medications:

- Using a pill organizer with one or more sections for each day.
- There are electronic pill organizers which can dispense medications on a set schedule.
- Organizing medication on one shelf alphabetically or according to their frequency of use.
- Using personal markers or even colors on the tip of the bottle so each medication can be readily identified.
- Changing pill bottle shapes or sizes to differentiate between medications.
- Also, putting rubber bands on the bottle to indicate how many doses need to be taken each day.

-William Van Ry

Memory Game



It is very important to exercise the mind as well as the body. With each edition of our newsletter, we will include a memory word game for you to complete.

Word Game



Last issues word: **HYPNOTIC**

hint	pinot	point	tiny	itch
hypo	pint	pointy	tonic	itchy
phonic	pinto	pony	tony	chin
phony	piny	python	topi	chino
phot	pitch	notch	topic	chip
photic	pith	ontic	typo	chit
phyton	pithy	optic	icon	chop
picot	piton	otic	inch	city
pinch	pity	thin	into	coin
cony	copy			

The average is 35 words. Did you meet or beat this standard?

Can you find 39 words in next issues word **EVOLVING?**

Keeping Track of Medications Safely

The over 65 population in America purchases and consumes more medications than any other age group. According to the Food and Drug Administration, they purchase more than 30 percent of all prescription medication and more than 40 percent of over the counter (OTC) medicines. Estimates are that as many as 90 percent of seniors use either herbal remedies or vitamins.

Interactions:

Drug interactions are especially a concern for seniors. Some experts estimate that seniors take an average of four to five medications on a daily basis. If physicians aren't aware of all medications a senior is taking, there is the potential for dangerous drug interactions.

To guard against an interaction, make a list of all medications, vitamins and herbal remedies that your client is taking. Also, beside each medication, write the contact information of the physician who prescribed the medicine. Some physicians may not realize how many other doctors their patients are seeing. Take this list to each doctor appointment and be sure that it is kept current.

Avoid Pharmacy Shopping:

With the rising cost of medications, many seniors choose to shop for the cheapest price without realizing the benefits of staying with one pharmacy. Poly-pharmacy, the "technical" name for pharmacy shopping, is often a source of confusion and drug interactions. The patient frequently overlooks the pharmacist as someone who can be of tremendous help to them. Pharmacists can often spot drug interactions, possible problems, and can possibly recommend OTC medications that can safely be taken with prescription medicines. Include the pharmacist's information on the medication

list that you provide to each doctor. When doctors call in a prescription, make sure that they use the same pharmacy each time.

Throw away Outdated Medicines:

Some people prefer to keep medications longer to save money on prescription costs. **Don't.** Some medicines degrade over time with exposure to light and heat. Plus, you may need a different medicine the next time. If you rely on medications you have at home instead of advice from your physician, you could be headed for trouble. Be sure to call your physician before using medication that you have at home.

A special word about antibiotics: These are meant to be taken in their entirety when they are prescribed. Saving some for the next infection may cause serious health problems. Bacteria may become resistant to antibiotics and need even stronger medication the next time. Plus, for the second infection, a different class of antibiotics may be used in order to prevent resistance build-up.

Watch for Side Effects:

Seniors especially can be sensitive to new medications. Ask your doctor about possible side effects of the medication and how it may react with other medicines that you are currently taking. Most pharmacies hand out leaflets with information about drug side effects and when to contact the doctor. Read these leaflets and keep them in a safe place for future reference, especially if you have to take the medicine long-term. Caregivers need to be aware of how to cross-reference these and hand-carry them to the doctor if necessary to be sure that the right medication is being prescribed.

Borrowing or Lending Medicine:

A big concern for physicians today is taking medication intended for someone else. This is a dangerous practice that needs to be eliminated. Prescription medication should

never be taken by anyone else than for whom it was intended. Other individuals have special medical histories and may also be taking other medicines that can cause serious drug interactions. By the same token, never give away your old prescription medication.

What if medication is left over and you want to donate it? The best advice here is not to donate it. Most places can't accept medication donations and will only have to dispose of the medicine after you leave. If you think they may be able to use it, call ahead to find out. There are some outreach projects that are able to accept donated medications, providing that specific instructions are followed. Don't assume that the charity will be able to accept your medication (or medical supplies even) without checking with them first.

Skipping Doses:

Take each medicine as prescribed and don't skip doses to make the medication stretch further. Skipping doses can cause problems later when your condition isn't managed properly. If you need help paying for medications, there are more than 40 patient assistance programs available depending on your situation and the program's guidelines.

Most medications are listed with www.needymeds.com. You can look up the name with either the name brand or generic name. In addition, it is possible to print the forms online and take them to your doctor's office for helping filling them out. You may also need the doctor's signature to verify the prescription. These programs generally ask for financial information to be sure you meet income criteria and a physician's signature. Some companies will ship medications directly to you while others require that medicines be sent to your doctor's office.

Check, Check, and Recheck:

Before taking a medication, double-check the label to be sure that you are taking it according to your doctor's instructions. Never rely on your memory, especially since seniors tend to take so many different medications. You may have several medications with similar names and a medication mistake can be costly.

Also, make sure you're giving the correct dosage. If there are instructions for "weaning" off a medication, be sure to follow these exactly. Medications like oral steroids may have serious side effects if not taken correctly when you are trying to stop a medication that may have been taken long-term.

Are you taking the medication correctly? Is it an oral medicine or is it an injectable medicine? An oral medicine that is accidentally injected could have painful, if not lethal consequences.

Finally, make sure you're giving the medicine at the right time. There is generally a two hour window of time that a medicine can be given. This window starts one hour before the medicine is prescribed and ends one hour after its time. For example, if a medicine is prescribed at 2 p.m., you can usually start giving it at 1 p.m. up until 3 p.m. During this window, you can usually take the prescribed dosage without harmful side effects. To be sure that the window of time applies to your situation, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Seniors may have problems with feeling in the tips of their fingers and may have difficulty feeling the pills in their hands. Watch for medicines on the floor around the area where they generally take their medicines. If there are several pills on the floor or on the cabinet, it could be a sign that they are dropping one of their pills and not getting the medication they need. Caregivers can develop a system where they watch

them take medicines or even administer the medications themselves.

Taken properly, all medications have their purpose. Determining the best way for your client to take medicines may take some work and documentation on your part in order to develop the right management system for your household and comfort level. Be sure to check with your client's physician and pharmacist if you suspect a problem or need additional information

Finally, proper storage of medications is essential. Keep medicines stored in a cool, dry area away from moisture or heat. The kitchen cabinets often serve as a favorite place to keep medicines. Be sure the cabinets chosen aren't subject to the moisture or heat changes near refrigerators, dishwasher steam, or even steam from the kitchen sink. This holds true for bathroom cabinets as well.



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