

NATIONAL AGEING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Tips on Healthy Ageing

SAFE USE OF MEDICATION

Older people are the greatest users of medicines, and 17% of people over the age of 75 years take 6 or more medications.

Medicines can improve quality of life for many Australians, and play an important part in the prevention of diseases such as heart disease and stroke. Equally, they can do harm if taken incorrectly. Approximately 140,000 admissions to hospital per year in Australia may relate to problems with medicines.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle may decrease the need for certain medications.

Here are some tips to avoid risks and help you get the best results from your medicines:

- take medicines only as directed
- always clarify with your doctor the right way to take your medicine before you begin to use it – keep asking until you get the information you need – ask for written instructions.
- make sure your doctor is aware of any other medication you are taking, including non-prescription tablets such as vitamins and natural medicines. Take all your medicines (prescription and non-prescription) with you when you visit your doctor.
- always tell your doctor about past problems you have had with drugs, such as loss of appetite, rashes or dizziness
- contact your doctor straight away if you experience any problems with your medicine. If not available ask your pharmacist for advice
- If you find it difficult to remember which medications you need to take, ask your pharmacist or doctor about aids that may help e.g. Webster-paks or pill boxes.

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Do not:

- Stop taking a prescription drug without your doctor's approval, even if you feel better
- Take more/less than the prescribed dose
- Mix alcohol and medication without your doctor's approval
- Take drugs prescribed for someone else

When taking any medication it is important for you to understand what medicines you are taking, why you are taking them, how you should take them, for how long you should take them and any possible side effects you may expect. If you have any questions relating to medicines you are taking, consult your doctor or pharmacist.

A useful website, with information in various languages is Medimate, which gives advice about keeping healthy with and without medicines, how to use medicines safely and using multiple medicines safely.

Use hyperlink to visit Medimate: <http://www.nps.org.au>

NPS Medicines Information Line 1 800 888 763.