

**Q: Is there a way to keep my medications straight?**

A: As many as 75% of the elderly don't take their medications as prescribed by their doctor. They call this "medication noncompliance". The three most common mistakes are: 1) under use of drugs 2) forgetting to take meds and 3) altering schedules and doses.

Here are some tips to help you take your medicines correctly:

- If you are taking different medications at various times during the day, check with your doctor to see if your medications can be consolidated, or if you can get a longer-acting formula that requires less doses per day.
- If it's hard to take your medicine for any reason, ask if a liquid or tablet form is available. If pills are hard to swallow, get a pill crusher to grind them u. Large tablets can be cut along the score mark – but check with your pharmacist, since not all medications can be broken or crushed.
- If you have any side effects from a drug, tell your doctor. Adjusting the dose might take care of the problem, or switching to a different medication. But don't skip medications or adjust the dose on your own.
- Get a pillbox to help keep your pills straight. You can get an electronic pillbox time that sounds an alarm when the dose is due.
- Use a pocket or purse-sized pillbox to keep your meds handy. Keep two supplies- one at home and one in your car or at work.
- Be familiar with the dosage instructions. Seniors can be more sensitive to side effects.
- Some over-the-counter drugs should be avoided when taken along with prescription drugs. Over-the-counter medication may weaken a particular prescription's effectiveness.
- Learn what to do if you miss a dose. Doubling a dose to make up for a missed dose can be dangerous.
- Don't just discontinue a drug. Stopping abruptly can have bad consequences especially if you've been taking that drug over a long period of time.
- If you are skipping doses because a drug is too expensive, talk to your doctor about the free drug programs offered by most pharmacy companies, or call the Massachusetts Prescription Advantage program at 1-800-AgeInfo.
- Post a current list of drugs you take on your refrigerator.
- Get a family member or friend to help you review each drug you take, and go over these drug tips with them.

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