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## Fact Sheet: Prescription Medication Use by Older Adults

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When appropriately prescribed, administered and monitored, medications are a cost-effective way to help older adults maintain health, recover from illness or control symptoms of chronic disease.<sup>[1]</sup> **Older adults can live stronger, longer by carefully following their doctor's and pharmacist's instructions regarding medications.**

### Medication Use by Older Adults

- People age 65 and older make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, but account for 34 percent of all prescription medication use and 30 percent of all over-the-counter medication use.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Because older adults often take numerous medications prescribed by multiple health care providers, their risk of having an adverse reaction is greater than that of younger adults.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Among older adults, adverse reactions due to medication can be very serious, including falls, depression, confusion, hallucinations and malnutrition.<sup>[4]</sup>

### Barriers to Proper Medication Use

- Nearly one in four older adults skips doses of medication or does not fill prescriptions because of cost.<sup>[5]</sup>
- Memory impairment and sensory changes such as vision loss that often occur among older adults can create challenges for correctly adhering to complex medication regimens.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Consequences of Improper Use

- According to researchers, about 60 percent of older adults take their prescriptions improperly, and approximately 140,000 die each year as a result.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Research shows that older adults who fail to take prescribed medications were 76 percent more likely to experience a significant decline in their overall health than those who took all medications as prescribed.<sup>[8]</sup>

### Recommendations for Using Medications Safely

- Listen carefully when your doctor prescribes medication, and ask questions to find out the name of the drug, its purpose, and any potential side effects. Ask a family member to accompany you to a doctor's visit to help take notes about medication regimens.
- Always follow your doctor's instructions, as well as any instructions printed on the medication's label, very closely. Be sure to pay attention to how often a medication should be taken and if it can or should be taken with food. Do not stop taking your prescribed medicines even if you feel better, unless told to do so by your doctor.
- Once a year, make a "brown bag" visit to your primary care doctor's office. Bring all your medications, both prescription and over-the-counter. Your doctor can help you weed out any expired medications and make sure that all of your medications are compatible.

- Try to fill all of your prescriptions at the same pharmacy so that the pharmacist can check for drug interactions.

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<http://www.nphw.org>

## References

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