

Healthy LIVING while aging!



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Medication Safety Check-In: What to Ask Your Pharmacist

by Natalie Mazzullo, M.Ed.

August is a great time for a mid-year medication check-in. If you're like many older adults, you may take multiple prescriptions, over-the-counter medications or supplements. Taking a few minutes to review them — especially during the summer months — can help you stay safe, avoid unwanted side effects and get the most benefit from your medications.

Programs like the Sanford Center for Aging Medication Therapy Management program emphasize that medication safety isn't just about what you take. It's about how, when and why you take it, as well as possible interactions. Important for all patients to know what medications they are taking and why they are taking them.

Start with a simple medication review

Bring a complete list of everything you take to your pharmacist or healthcare provider. Include prescriptions, vitamins and herbal supplements.

Ask:

- Do I still need all of these medications?
- Are there duplicates or unnecessary combinations?
- Are there safer or simpler options?

Watch for interactions

Medications can interact with each other — or even with certain foods. These interactions can cause side effects like dizziness, confusion or increased fall risk.

Ask your pharmacist:

- Which of my medications interact?
- Should I avoid certain foods or alcohol?
- What side effects should I watch for?

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Be heat-aware

Summer heat can change how your body responds to medications. Some drugs increase sensitivity to heat, reduce sweating or raise the risk of dehydration. Common culprits include diuretics, heart medications and some antidepressants.

Ask:

- Do any of my medications affect how I handle heat?
- Should I adjust fluid intake or activity levels?

Store medications properly

High temperatures can reduce medication effectiveness. Avoid storing medications in hot places like cars, garages or near windows.

Instead:

- Keep medications in a cool, dry place
- Check labels for storage instructions
- Use a pill organizer to stay on track

Keep a routine

Taking medications at the same time each day helps prevent missed or double doses. Set reminders or pair medications with daily habits like meals or brushing your teeth.

Quick Tip

If something doesn't feel right — new symptoms, unusual fatigue, or confusion — don't ignore it. It could be medication related.

Bottom Line

A quick medication check-in today can prevent serious problems tomorrow. Partner with your pharmacist, ask questions, and stay informed so you can continue living healthy, safely and independently.

Visit med.unr.edu/sanford/health-services/medication-review for more information.

Please visit extension.unr.edu/Healthy-Aging to enjoy our accessible, online newsletter and discover additional Healthy Aging education and resources. Or, email HealthyAging@unr.edu.

Eight Tips to Avoid Catching Colds as We Move into the Fall Months

1. Stay up to date on vaccines

August is National Immunization Awareness month. Vaccines are the best protection against severe illness, especially for older adults and those with chronic conditions. They may not prevent every infection, but they can reduce complications and support a quicker recovery.

2. Wash hands often

Frequent handwashing is one of the simplest ways to prevent illness.

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Wash particularly after being in public, using the restroom or before eating.
- Keep hand sanitizer (60% alcohol or more) nearby.

3. Improve airflow

- Good ventilation reduces germs in the air.
- Open windows, use fans or consider a HEPA air purifier.
- When possible, spend time outdoors.

4. Practice good hygiene

Cough or sneeze into your elbow — not your hands. This helps prevent germs from spreading.

5. Limit close contact when illness is around

- Skip kisses and avoid sharing food or drinks if someone is sick. You can still enjoy time together with games, reading or conversation.
- Avoid crowded indoor spaces during peak cold season or wear a mask when in close contact with others in crowded areas.

6. Clean high-touch surfaces

Regularly clean high-touch surfaces in your home, including doorknobs, light switches, faucet handles, remotes and phones. Use standard cleaners or a simple bleach solution (1/3 cup of bleach per gallon of water).

7. Avoid face touching

Keep hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth, as they are primary entry points for viruses.

8. Take care of yourself

- Ensure you get good, uninterrupted sleep.
- Eat a balanced diet rich in protein, vegetables and fruits.
- Stay hydrated.
- Manage your stress to help keep your immune system strong.

Stay Connected—Safely

- Plan visits when you are healthy
- Choose outdoor activities when possible
- Use video calls if illness is circulating
- Keep visits shorter during peak cold and flu season

When to Call Your Doctor? Seek medical care if you have:

- Fever over 101°F
 - Trouble breathing or chest pain
 - Severe fatigue or confusion
 - Symptoms that worsen or don't improve
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Bottom Line – Remember, someone else's cold can be mild for them but more serious for you, especially as an older adult. With a few simple steps, you can protect your health and continue enjoying your time with others.

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