



# Using Food and Medicine Safely



Many older adults take a large number of drugs (3 or more) to deal with health problems. People over 65 years old take more than 30% of all medications ordered by doctors and buy 40% of all over-the-counter drugs. Seniors who take many medications have a high risk for drug interactions, drug/food interactions, and side effects. What we eat and drink can affect the medicine we take. In some cases, medications will not work well if taken with some types of food or drinks or may have dangerous side effects. Talk to your doctor before using herbal remedies, alcohol, tobacco and caffeine. Almost 40% of all harmful drug reactions reported each year involve people age 60 and older.

## Food and Drugs

When drugs and certain foods are taken at the same time they can “interact.” There are many types of interactions with food and medicine. Some foods can speed up or slow down the action of a drug. This can make the drug work poorly. Other foods can change our eating patterns, making us hungry when we are not or feel full when our body is hungry. This can be dangerous because we might eat too much or not enough.

### Tips to use food and drugs safely:

- Check with your doctor to see if you should avoid any types of foods that can interact with your medications.
- Before you drink caffeine (coffee, tea, soda pop) and alcohol (beer, wine, liquor) or use tobacco products (cigarettes, cigars or chewing tobacco) check with your doctor. These items can change the effect of a drug or cause dangerous side effects.
- Never mix medicine into food or drinks without asking your doctor first. Mixing food and medicine can change the effect of the drug or cause dangerous side effects.
- Take medications at the right time. In some cases, medications should be taken before, during or after meals. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.

### Tips to use medication safely:

- Make sure your medicine is clearly labeled and carefully follow all the instructions. If you don't understand the instructions, ask someone to explain them.
- Review all your medications with your doctor, pharmacist or a registered dietitian once a year or when you start taking a new medication.
- Also check with your doctor before taking non-prescription drugs with your prescription drugs to be sure they are safe to take at the same time.

- Keep a record of the medications you are taking and organize your medication schedule. Take your medicine at the times prescribed. If you need help ask your pharmacist or healthcare provider for tips on organizing and keeping track of your medications and their schedules.
- Take your medications for as long as they are prescribed. Symptoms sometimes go away before the condition has totally cleared up.
- Never take more medication than prescribed.
- Never take any medication that has been prescribed for a friend or a relative.
- Do not skip or stop taking medication without talking to your doctor. If you can't afford your medications, talk with your doctor or pharmacist - there are programs that may be able to help you buy what you need.

## **Drug Interactions**

Drug interactions can be serious. They often go unnoticed or are thought to be part of “normal aging.” Drugs can interact with food, other medications, as well as alcohol, caffeine and tobacco. Some people can't sleep, sleep too much, won't eat, feel dizzy, worry a lot and are just not themselves. If you notice changes in yourself or someone you love, have your food and medicine checked by a doctor, pharmacist or dietitian. These interactions can be fixed so you feel better and get healthier.

For more information on food and drug interactions visit the websites below:

<http://www.fda.gov/oc/seniors/>

<http://www.nclnet.org/Food%20&%20Drug.pdf>

*This brochure should not replace the advice from your physician, pharmacist, or other health care professional. If you have any questions or concerns about possible food or drug interactions, consult your health care professional.*