

# Prescription Dangers for Seniors

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Some drug interactions can be deadly; others can result in very serious health problems. Older adults consume one-third of prescription medications and 40 to 50 percent of over-the-counter medications so they are at extremely high risk of experiencing such complications.

In 2004 and 2005, patients 65 years old and older visited emergency rooms approximately 177,504 times for adverse drug events. Pair this with the fact that changes in your body as you age influence the strength and effectiveness of medications, and you reach the statistic that seniors account for *half* of the deaths from medication complications.

The most common adverse effects from medication include bleeding from the blood-thinner Warfarin, peptic ulcers that bleed when an individual takes too much ibuprofen (active ingredient in Advil and Motrin), and falls and automobile accidents that are caused by excessive amounts or inappropriate use of sleep aids, narcotics, or anti-anxiety drugs.

It is estimated that 35 to 40 percent of falls and fractures among older adults are related to medication problems and interactions.

What is the issue at hand? Although many physicians keep a list of a patient's medications, many are prescribed as a brand name one month and a generic name the next. They also come in various forms, further complicating matters. Other patients often do not know what they are taking or how to take

medications correctly. They can have problems hearing, seeing, or remembering, further worsening the odds of taking medication inappropriately.

How can we prevent such a large number of negative health situations?

Suggestions to avoid prescription interaction in older adults include investing in a large print pillbox and compiling a complete medication list with a checklist and dates/times. Doctors should have patients bring all of their medications with them to appointments, and go over the use of each one to confirm that they are taken as prescribed.

This clearly involves time and effort, but in the end, families, patients, and doctors can all work together to avoid irreversible or deadly mistakes.