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Help Your Medications Do Their Best

The Food and Drug Administration estimates that as many as fifty percent of people don't take their medicines as prescribed. Medicine-related illnesses cost over seventy six billion dollars a year - just in hospital stays.

Twenty eight percent of hospital stays for senior citizens are drug related - eleven percent for not following directions and seventeen percent related to adverse drug reactions.

Getting older may change the way the body responds to drugs. Many senior citizens must take more than one medication each day. The more medicines you take, the greater the chance for side effects. This may include increased or decreased appetite, change in taste, constipation, drowsiness, diarrhea, or nausea. Large doses of vitamins or minerals act like drugs and can also cause harm. Some people may think that symptoms of drug interactions are just signs of getting older and may not relate them to the medications they are taking.

How can these problems be avoided? First get all your prescription medications at one pharmacy so the pharmacy knows all the prescribed medications you are taking. The pharmacist can review your records and catch medications that can cause adverse reactions.

Make sure every doctor you go to knows every medication you are taking. This includes prescription medicines, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and minerals and any herbal products you are taking. Make a list that include every one of these, share it with your doctors and your pharmacist. The pharmacist won't know what over-the-counter medications and food supplements you are taking so you need to share your list with him/her. Ask questions about medications the doctor is prescribing. Ask what is it for, what is it supposed to do, when and how you should take it, and what precautions you should take. If you enjoy alcoholic beverages ask the doctor if your medications will be affected by alcohol. Ask about taking the medicine with grapefruit juice. With most medications there is no problem, but a few medications should not be taken at the same time as your drink grapefruit juice. You can still enjoy the grapefruit juice - just don't take it at the same time you are taking the medications.

There are many herbal products on the market. Herbal medications have been used for centuries. Most of them are safe to use but some can cause problems when people are already taking prescribed medications for chronic health conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, etc. Some herbal products act as blood thinners and when they are taken along with prescribed blood

thinners can cause excessive bleeding. This is why your doctor should also know about any herbal products you are taking.

If you are going to have surgery it's very important that your doctor knows about any herbal medications you are taking. Some can change how your anesthesia works, others can cause the heart to beat faster. It will be necessary to stop taking the herbal products for a few days before you have surgery so they are out of your system

It is important to do your homework and check reliable information before deciding to take a new herbal product. The labels are not required to give warnings about possible side effects like medications that are recognized by the Food and Drug Administration are. Use unbiased resources that are not produced by the companies that sell herbal products so you can understand the benefits and concerns about the different herbal products. Ask your doctor and pharmacist about any herbal products and over-the-counter medications you are taking so they can warn you of possible problems.

We all want to feel really good in our senior years but it pays to be really careful about the medications you are taking. Do your homework and make sure your pharmacist and doctors are involved in helping you make the best decisions.