



You may consider discussing the following medications with your health care team to see if they are appropriate to continue taking:

- Aspirin
- Pain medications (i.e., Advil®)
- Allergy medications (i.e., Benadryl®)
- Anxiety medications (i.e., Xanax®)
- Sleep medications (i.e., Ambien®)
- Acid-reflux medications (i.e., Prilosec®)
- Cholesterol medications (i.e., Lipitor®)

**Note: You should always talk to your prescriber or pharmacist before stopping or changing the dose of any medication!*

Courtney Skriptshak, PharmD, October 2020

What is deprescribing?

Deprescribing is the process of reducing or stopping medications that are unnecessary, ineffective, or potentially harmful. This process is used to improve quality of life and minimize the total number of medications. Deprescribing is a collaborative decision-making process involving patients, family members, pharmacists, and other health care providers.

Why is deprescribing important?

Almost half of the elderly population takes at least five medications,¹ and one in five of these may be inappropriate.¹ Medications come with both benefits and risks. Some are suitable for short-term use but may not be needed long-term, such as those for sleep conditions. The combination of medications can increase the risk of side effects and drug interactions, particularly in older adults. As you age, your body becomes more sensitive to medication side effects, which can lead to more hospital and emergency room visits.

What are some potential harmful effects of medications?

All medications have their own side effects that you may experience with use. Some side effects such as headaches, nausea, diarrhea, or constipation, can be easily managed and may resolve over time. However, other side effects can be more serious and bothersome, especially in older adults. These include dizziness, sleepiness, confusion, forgetfulness, dry mouth, dry eyes, blurred vision, and urinary issues. If not closely monitored and corrected, these side effects can lead to falls, fractures, and hospitalization.

What makes older adults more likely to have side effects from medications?

As you age, your brain becomes more sensitive to the effects of different medications. Some medications may stay in your body longer due to lower muscle mass, increased body fat, and less efficient organs that process and eliminate them from your body. Additionally, your body tends to contain less water as you age, which can increase the concentration of the medications. This usually means that older adults often require lower doses of medications, such as those for high blood pressure.

How should I keep track of all my medications?

It is important for you to know what medications you are taking at home, including prescription and over-the-counter medications. Individuals should always keep an updated medication list, especially when visiting different health care providers or going to the hospital. This list should include any medication allergies. To keep the medication list up to date, ask your health care provider or pharmacist the following questions at each visit:

- What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
- How do I take my medications, and for how long?
- How will I know if my medication is working?
- What side effects do I watch for?
- Do I need any tests to monitor the medications?
- When is my next visit?

How do I start a conversation with my health care providers about stopping medications?

Having a good relationship with your health care team is an important part of safe and effective care. Most adults prefer to take fewer medications, but often wait for the prescriber to start the conversation. Communicating with your provider may be challenging due to time constraints or frequently changing doctors, making it difficult to build a strong relationship. Here are some questions you can ask to start the conversation about deprescribing:

- Why am I taking this medication?
- What are the benefits and harms of taking this medication?
- Can this medication impact my memory or increase my risk of falling?
- Should I still be taking this medication?
- Can you help me reduce or stop this medication safely?

Summary

Deprescribing is a process that helps reduce the number of medications an individual takes at home. This process starts with a shared conversation between the individual and their prescriber. Taking more than five medications can increase the risk of harmful effects. Most adults wait for their prescriber to start the conversation about deprescribing. If you feel that you are taking too many medications, you should start the conversation with your health care providers to decrease your risk of harm and improve your quality of life.



Go online to find more information and to view the references for this toolkit.

aapp.org/466830

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