



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!*

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What is deprescribing?

Deprescribing is the process of reducing or stopping medications that may not be needed, may not work well, or may not be a good fit for an individual. This process is used to improve quality of life and reduce the number of medications. The deprescribing process is a shared process that involves patients, family members, pharmacists, and other health care providers.

Why is deprescribing important?

Almost half of the elderly population takes at least five medications at home.¹ About one in five medications may be inappropriate for the individual. Medications come with both benefits and risks. Some medications are good for short-term use but may not be needed long-term such as medications for sleep conditions. The combination of medications can increase an individual's risk of side effects. Combining multiple medications also increases the chance that the medications may interact with each other. This is especially true for older adults. As you get older, your body becomes more sensitive to the side effects of medications. Some side effects can be harmful, 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 of these side effects can be easily managed and may go away over time, such as headaches, nausea, diarrhea, or constipation. However, other side effects can have more serious and bothersome consequences, especially in older adults, which includes feeling dizzy, sleepy, confused, or forgetful along with experiencing dry mouth, dry eyes, blurred vision, and urinary issues. These side effects are just a few examples but can lead to falls, fractures, and hospitalization if they are not closely monitored and are left uncorrected.

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

As you get older, your brain becomes more sensitive to the effects of different medications. Some medications may stay in your body longer due to lower muscle mass, more body fat, and less efficient organs that process the medications and remove them from your body. In addition, your body tends to contain less water when you age, which can increase the concentration of the medications in your body. This usually means that older adults do not need as much medication as they used to, such as medications 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 medications and medications bought over the counter. Individuals should always keep an updated medication list with them, especially when visiting different health care providers or going to the hospital. Any medication allergies should be included on this list. To keep the medication list up to date, every time you meet with your health care provider or pharmacist you should ask them the following questions:

- 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, and what side effects do I watch for?
- Do I need any tests to monitor the medications, and 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 less medications, but they usually wait for the prescriber to start the conversation. Sometimes, communicating with your provider may be difficult due to time limits or due to constantly switching doctors, which makes it hard to form a good relationship with them. 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 decrease 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 from the medication. 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 increase 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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