

A pill for every ill? Make sure your medication is *really* helping you.

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Nowadays, it seems there is a choice of pills you can take for every symptom, big or small. Most people only have 10 minutes in their doctor's office to discuss health issues. A quick fix often comes in the form of a pill – and the number of pills can add up quickly if you count over-the-counter medication.

Two thirds of Canadians over the age of 65 take at least 5 different prescription medications; almost one third take 10 or more. What is important to know is that as we grow older, our bodies become more sensitive to medications, increasing the risk of harmful effects. These risks include drug interactions, falls and fractures, memory problems and even drug-related hospitalizations and death.



Not only are seniors at risk of harm from taking too many medications, but 40% of Canadians over the age of 65 take a medication considered unnecessary or potentially risky for seniors. Common medications such as sleeping pills, long-term prescriptions of proton-pump inhibitors for acid reflux, and antipsychotics for insomnia and dementia are no longer recommended. Opioids are another dangerous medication used to treat chronic non-cancer pain. As a geriatrician, I now advise patients to try non-drug therapy to treat their symptoms whenever possible. It may take more time and effort, but the

benefits pay off down the road in terms of safety and effectiveness.

What can you do?

Check out the brochures and the information on the Canadian Deprescribing Network website (www.deprescribingnetwork.ca) to find out if your medications are safe, and whether you can substitute with safer alternatives. If your doctor suggests you take a new drug, you have the right to ask what the drug is for, what its benefits are and the risks of harm. Ask if there are equally effective lifestyle changes, exercise habits or other therapies you can try instead. Taking medication is, and always has to be, an informed choice.

Book a special appointment with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to review your complete medication list on a regular basis. What was good for you then, may not be good for you now.

Do you ever wonder if you still have to take all your medications? Ask about the possibility of “deprescribing”. Deprescribing is stopping or reducing the dose of a drug that may no longer be necessary or may be causing harm. Never stop a medication before speaking to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

For more information about medication safety, visit this website:
www.deprescribingnetwork.ca.