Understanding Medications Commonly Prescribed to Older People

Medications help us live longer and fuller lives. Yet as we get older, the number of different medications can increase and that may lead to potential problems that can actually endanger an older person's health.

Make sure that your elder relatives are aware of the potential dangers arising from the misuse of their medications, which can include ignoring proper dosages or taking medications together that simply don't mix.

If you are concerned an older relative may be confused about his or her medications, suggest you accompany them to their general physician and discuss the situation.

Here are some tips to help you understand and stay up to date on these medications:

- **Review all medications.**
- **Encourage your relative to review their medications with their family doctor.**
- If your relative is seeing a number of different specialists for different conditions, the **physician may wish to take an inventory of the different medications that are being prescribed.**
- **Help your relative to remove all outdated medications.** Many pharmacists are happy to accept these.
- **Keep a list of the medications your relative is taking, along with dosages.** If your relative needs to go into hospital care suddenly, the doctors will want to see this list.
- **Understand the medication regime.**
- **Make sure your relative knows that skipping daily medications can affect the long-term result.**
- **Check to make sure your relative knows how and when to take their medications.** Different types may need to be taken at different times of day, in combination with food or on an empty stomach.
- It can become confusing when specialists prescribe new medications. **Make sure your relative understands if new prescriptions are to be taken in addition to existing ones or as a substitution.**
- I**t's helpful to register all prescriptions with just one trusted pharmacy.** Most pharmacists keep track of individual prescriptions and will alert your relative if a newly prescribed medication may prove harmful in combination with other prescriptions they are taking. Most pharmacists are happy to review the list of prescriptions that are being taken and can provide clear directions for use.
- **Watch for overuse.** Overuse of some medications for anxiety or sleep problems may increase the risk of falls or motor vehicle accidents.
- **Encourage your relative to inform the doctor if they drink alcohol or take other over-the-counter medicationsthat may negatively react with prescriptions.**

Simplified Tips

In addition to the suggestions outlined above, there are further measures you can take to avoid medication mix-ups:

- Help ensure all medications are properly labelled.
- If vision is a problem, suggest asking the pharmacist to have labels printed in larger type.
- It can be helpful to use a plastic pill container that has each day of the week inscribed on it. Some pharmacists are able to pre-fill these containers.
- Help your relative make a list of the times and dosages for all the medications.

While understanding the specifics of various medications may be difficult for you and/or your elder relative, there are ways to make this a less daunting task. In addition to the suggestions outlined in this article, be sure to consult with a healthcare professional or pharmacist to clarify any further concerns that you may have.