



## Managing Meds

One of my greatest joys is traveling the country to talk with family caregivers. Many times, of course, it is at our own Fearless Caregiver Conferences; but often it is as a speaker at other events. A few years ago, I was in California talking about the caregiver's role in medication compliance at a national aging conference. The room was filled with family caregivers who were concerned about making sure that their loved ones would take their medications on time and correctly, even if they lived across the country from the family caregiver. The reasons for their concerns are actually borne out by statistics. Older women consume 60 percent of all prescription and over-the-counter medications; the number of prescriptions written for older adults averages 15 per person per year; and 83 percent of people over 65 are taking prescription medications. With 15 medications to take on a regular basis, accidental overdosing or even misdosing would be a problem for anyone; but for many of our loved ones, the risks are increased by memory loss, hearing difficulties and low vision.

### Caregiver Medication Compliance Tips:

- Find out how foods, vitamins, aspirin and supplements can affect the medications your loved one is taking.
- Use a pill bottle or electronic pill organizer and organize the medications by day, preferably at least a week in advance.
- Make sure your loved one takes medications exactly as directed by their doctor. Make sure that they don't stop prematurely or change the timing or dosage without consulting their physician.
- Make sure that your loved one knows never to take any medication prescribed for someone else.
- Regularly check the medicine chest and refrigerator for medication usage patterns, expiration dates, and to ensure timely refills.

I had spoken many times about this topic before the above-mentioned conference, but something that these audience members told me really opened my eyes. One lady stood up and described the elaborate system she had in place for her loved one's medication management; but when it came to her own medications, she spoke of holding back on some pills, or even cutting pills in half, trying to save money. Others in the audience soon added their own accounts to the conversation. Medications should be taken carefully and with great awareness as to risks as well as benefits. Self-medicating is dangerous, but so is under-medicating, for you or your loved one.

As in everything else having to do with caregiving, successful medication management works best when you work as a team.



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