



News Release

Methodist Hospital
I-65 at 21st Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-1367

Telephone: (317) 962-2335
Contact: James Mowry

For Release: Immediate

September 1, 2009

Seniors and Medication Safety

Older adults often need medication for chronic conditions and seniors are taking more medication now than ever before. Recent studies show that the average person over 65 takes between two and seven prescription medications daily.

According to **Dr. James Mowry, Director, Indiana Poison Center**, "The body's processes are altered and often slow down as we grow older and this affects the way medications work. This can create a greater risk of drug interactions and side effects. In fact, almost 40 percent of all adverse drug reactions reported each year involve people over the age of 60."

The Indiana Poison Center offers the following tips to seniors for safe use of medication:

- **Read the label every time you take a dose** to make sure you have the correct medication and follow the label instructions *exactly*.
- Review all medications with your doctor or pharmacist at least once a year or whenever you start taking a new medication. Your health care provider(s) should know about all of the medications you take including all prescription, non-prescription, herbal, dietary supplements and any other type of medication.
- **Try to use only one pharmacy** – it's easier for the pharmacist to check for drug interactions if he or she is aware of everything you are taking.
- Get prescriptions refilled far enough in advance to avoid running out of medication.

- Before you travel, ask if you need to adjust your medication schedule to account for changes in time, routine and diet. When flying, carry your medications in your hand luggage in case checked luggage is lost.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you drink alcohol or take non-prescription drugs with prescription drugs.
- **Keep a record of all medications you are taking and organize your dosing schedule.** If you take several, keep a record of them as you take them. Ask your pharmacist or doctor for tips on organizing and keeping track of your medications.
- **Never take medication in the dark.** Turn on the light and if you need glasses to read, be sure to wear them so you can read the label.
- Take medications at the proper time. They may need to be taken before, after or during meals. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Take your medications for the length of time they are prescribed for, even if symptoms disappear. If you stop taking them too soon, your recovery may take longer.
- **Never take more or less than prescribed.** Taking more doesn't mean you'll get better faster.
- Never take anything that has been prescribed for a friend or relative. The same medication may work differently for different people. **Take only those prescription drugs that are prescribed for you.**
- Always replace child resistant caps carefully.
- Know what your medications look like. If a prescription refill looks different than before, ask your pharmacist to make sure it's the correct medication.

- Keep all medications in their original containers and store them in a cool, dry place, away from bright light. Unless the label says so, don't store medications in the refrigerator.
- **Never mix different medications in the same container.**
- Discard medication that you are no longer using, if you can't read the label or it's outdated. After the expiration date, the medication may not be effective.
- Keep the poison center phone number **1-800-222-1222** available.

Over The Counter (OTC) Medications

- Always read the label to find out what the medication is for, how to take it, what the ingredients are, and any warnings or precautions for use.
- Know what types of OTC medications to avoid taking with your prescription medications. **When in doubt, ask your pharmacist or doctor – don't guess!**
- Select products that will treat only the symptoms you have. Multi ingredient products, such as combination cold remedies, may contain medication for problems you don't have.
- Take the medication *exactly* as stated on the label. Taking too much can be harmful.
- Compare active ingredients before taking more than one OTC product. Many contain the same active ingredient and you may get more than the recommended dose without even knowing it.
- Dispose of all medications promptly after their expiration date and be careful not to throw them away where children or pets may find them.
- Most nonprescription medications are intended for temporary use. Talk to your doctor if taking an over the counter medication becomes more than a temporary practice.

Prescriptions for older adults are some of the most toxic medications, posing the greatest threat of a tragic outcome if taken by a child. Dr. Mowry would like to remind you that, "Even

the most loving grandparents can put their grandchildren in danger when they unknowingly overlook simple precautions. It's important for grandparents to lock all medication and household products away from children and to remember to return these products to a safe storage place *immediately* after using them”

- Make sure that medications in purses and suitcases are not available to children.
- Be careful with daily and weekly pill minders, most are not child resistant.
- Keep all medications and household products in the original labeled containers.
- Keep medication and household chemicals locked away out of children's reach.
- Avoid taking medication in front of young children since they like to imitate adults.
- Only give infants and children over-the-counter medications that are specially formulated for their age and weight.

To learn more about poison prevention and to receive a free tip sheet on how to dispose of unused and expired medication safely, call the Indiana Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222**, or visit the Center's website at www.clarian.org/poisoncontrol. For a poisoning emergency, call the Poison Center experts immediately at **1-800-222-1222**.

The Indiana Poison Center is an independent, non-profit, agency providing coverage and services for the entire state of Indiana. It serves as both an emergency telephone service and an information resource center, with services accessible to the general public and health care professionals 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The IPC is the designated Regional Poison Information Center for Indiana and is certified by the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a collaborative effort of the Indiana State Department of Health, Clarian Health, the Federal Health Resources Services Administration and health care providers throughout the state.