



Resources & Education for Stroke Caregivers'  
Understanding & Empowerment

## KEEPING YOUR LOVED ONE HEALTHY

# Managing Medicines

Helping your loved one take medicines is an important part of caregiving. Medicines help stroke survivors recover, but they sometimes cause problems. You can prevent most problems by safely managing medicines.

### What Should You Ask Your Healthcare Team About Your Loved One's Medicines?

- Ask why your loved one should take each medicine. Ask about the possible side effects.
- Make sure you know the dosage (amount of pills), times and directions for taking the medicines.
- Take notes. Ask about anything you don't understand.

### Where Can You Find Helpful Information About Your Loved One's Medicines?

Read the drug information sheet from the pharmacy. Watch for side effects listed on the drug information sheet. Call your healthcare team if side effects occur.

Read about the drug interactions. Know which medicines are safe to use together. Carefully read the labels that the pharmacist attaches to the medicines. Ask the pharmacist if you don't understand something.

Know the color, shape and size of the medicines. Check with the pharmacist if new medicines look different than medicines that were taken before.

### How Can You Keep Your Loved One's Medicines Organized?

Keep a list of all medicines. Write down the name, purpose, amount, directions and possible side effects of each medicine.

Keep the list in a handy place in your loved one's home. Keep copies of the list in your wallet and your loved one's wallet. Bring the list to all healthcare visits.

Register with My HealthVet at <http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>. You will be able to keep a log of the medicines and supplements your loved one is taking.

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:  
<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

## How Can You Help Your Loved One Remember to Take Medicines?

**Take medicines at the same time each day** – If possible, take medicines with meals or right before bedtime. This will help to make taking medicines a habit.

**Buy a pillbox at your pharmacy** – The pillbox has separate boxes for each day of the week and for different times of the day. Some pillboxes come with alarms that ring when the next pill should be taken.

**Use other reminders like alarm clocks and watches with alarms** – Place notes on refrigerators and calendars to help your loved one remember.

**Talk with your health care provider if a pill is missed** – Forgetting to take medicines can be dangerous.

## How Do You Prevent Errors?

- Make sure that your healthcare team has a list of all medicines. Your healthcare team needs to know about medicines prescribed by different doctors, nurses and pharmacists.
- Use only one pharmacy. This will prevent your loved one from getting medicines that should not be taken together.
- Talk to the pharmacist or your healthcare team before taking any over-the-counter medicines (medicines not prescribed by your healthcare team) and vitamins. Some over-the-counter medicines and vitamins can be dangerous when used with medicines prescribed by your healthcare team.
- Keep medicines in their original bottles or containers. Do not mix pills in the same containers.
- Throw away medicines that your loved one is no longer taking. Toss out medicines that have expired.

## What Do You Do if Your Loved One Has Problems Swallowing?

- Ask the pharmacist if there is a liquid form or other form (such as a patch) of the medicine.
- Ask your healthcare team if the medicine can be crushed or chewed.

- Mix the medicine with applesauce or soft food to prevent choking.
- Encourage your loved one to sit straight or stand when taking medicines. Have your loved one drink at least one half cup of water when taking medicines.

## Helpful Tips

- Think about buying a bracelet or necklace to alert healthcare providers about your loved one's medical conditions. These bracelets show information about drug allergies, medical conditions and special needs such as blood type. You can purchase them at pharmacies.
- Ask your healthcare team about using generic drugs to save money. Your healthcare team will know which generic drugs are good for your loved one.
- Store medicines in a cool, dry place. Keep medicines in a place children and pets can't reach.
- Ask for refills of medicines several days before your loved one needs them. If you use the VA pharmacy, request your loved one's medicine refills using MyHealthVet, <http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>. Contact your local VA to find out how to use this feature.
- To save time, do not go to the pharmacy on Monday, the first of the month and around 5:00 pm. These are the busiest days and times.
- Tell your pharmacist to put medicines in easy-to-open bottles. Many stroke survivors have trouble opening bottles with child-safe caps.

## Remember

- Talk to your healthcare team about your loved one's medicines. Ask questions when you do not understand.
- Keep a list of your loved one's vitamins and prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Bring this list to healthcare visits.
- Use a reminder tool like a pillbox. This will help your loved one remember when to take medicines.

## More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:  
<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

**Link Disclaimer:** Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

**AARP (American Association of Retired Persons)**

Web: <http://www.aarp.org>

Phone: 1-888-687-2277

The AARP provides information on prescription medicines, Medicare prescription benefits and over-the-counter medicines.

The AARP also has helpful health tools such as a pill identifier and a drug interaction checker. Go to this link: [http://www.aarp.org/health/health\\_tools/](http://www.aarp.org/health/health_tools/)

**Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality**

Web: <http://www.ahrq.gov>

Phone: 1-301-427-1104

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has great tips on ways to stay healthy, take medicines safely and receive quality care.

“20 Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors”

<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/20tips.htm>

“Staying Healthy”

<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/healthy.html>

**Caregiver Library**

Web: <http://www.caregiverslibrary.org>

Phone: 1-804-327-1111

The Caregiver Library has several fact sheets dealing with managing medicines and pain. For a list of fact sheets, go to this page:

<http://www.caregiverslibrary.org/Default.aspx?tabid=165#medications>

## **Eldercare Online Network**

Web: <http://www.ec-online.net>

Email: [prisminnovations@gmail.com](mailto:prisminnovations@gmail.com)

The Eldercare Online Network has a resource guide on working with your pharmacist, taking medicines safely and storing medicines. Go to this link: <http://www.ec-online.net/CGE2/mmstoc.htm>

## **My HealthVet**

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet has guides on eating well, exercising and taking medicine safely. It has tools to help track your progress and additional resources.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”

## **National Council on Aging: Center for Healthy Aging**

Web: <http://www.healthyagingprograms.org>

Phone: 1-202-479-1200

The Center for Healthy Aging has several fact sheets and tools on managing medicines. For a list of fact sheets, go to this link:

<http://www.healthyagingprograms.org/content.asp?sectionid=70>

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**References:** Houts, P.S. (Ed.). (2004). *Eldercare at Home*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging; The American Association of Retired Persons. (n.d.). Retrieved August 27, 2008, from: [http://www.aarp.org/health/conditions/articles/otc\\_safety\\_tips.html](http://www.aarp.org/health/conditions/articles/otc_safety_tips.html); The Center for Healthy Aging. (n.d.). Retrieved August 27, 2008, from: <http://www.healthyagingprograms.org/content.asp?sectionid=70>.

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