IS YOUR GRANDMA ON DANGEROUS MEDS?

By dr. More

Many seniors rely on doctors to keep their grandmas from suffering from complaints like arthritis, high blood pressure, anxiety, or depression. But doctors may not know that their medications are actually making many of them sick and putting them at risk of hospitalization, disability, or even death. These drugs could be the reason for unexplained symptoms like fatigue, confusion, memory loss, or falls. How is this possible? The answer might surprise you. The drugs either don’t work, or they do more harm than good. This is why many seniors are on a dangerous mix of medicines that could be at the root of their problems. The FDA even warns that "Many seniors are on too many medications, which can make it difficult to know which one is causing a particular problem and may increase the risk of serious harm." Even worse, doctors may be prescribing medications to seniors that they have not tested for safety and effectiveness. Is your grandma take the right medications? Is your grandma on too many medications? Is your grandma's health care system really safe? If you have concerns about your grandma's health or medications, please contact your doctor or pharmacist.

How and when did this become a problem?

Seniors are at increased risk of medication problems. What is the problem? When doctors prescribe too many medications, they may not realize that adding a new drug can make it harder for the body to work properly. This is called polypharmacy. Even worse, seniors may not remember to take all their medications, so they may not be getting the results they need. This can lead to serious problems like confusion, memory loss, or falls.

How many medications are seniors on?

• 2 out of 3 Canadians over the age of 45 (62% over the age of 65) are on at least 5 prescription drugs.
• 1 in 20 seniors (5%) is on 10 or more medications.
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What is the risk of getting older if you have too many medications?

DOSAGE

Studies have found that as the number of medications people take increases, so do their risks of problems like hospitalization, disability, and even death. This is especially true for seniors, who are more likely to experience side effects from medication. For example, a study published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society found that seniors on 10 or more medications were twice as likely to experience hospitalization as seniors on 5 or fewer medications.

Common risky medications for seniors include:

- Statins (cholesterol-lowering drugs, such as simvastatin, atorvastatin, lovastatin)
- Antidepressants (such as fluoxetine, sertraline, citalopram)
- Antihypertensives (such as losartan, amlodipine, carvedilol)
- Antiarrhythmics (such as amiodarone, sotalol)
- Anti-inflammatory agents (such as ibuprofen, celecoxib, meloxicam)

How to do it?

• Review your grandmother's medications with your doctor. Ask your doctor if there are any unnecessary medications that can be safely stopped.
• Make sure your grandma is taking the right medications at the right time. This can help prevent side effects and improve their health.
• Encourage your grandma to discuss any side effects with their doctor. They may be able to adjust the dose or switch to a different medication.

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS

1. Why am I taking this medication?
2. What is the goal of this medication?
3. What are the expected benefits and risks of this medication?
4. Are there any alternative treatments that I can consider?
5. How will I know if this medication is working for me?

Click for more info about polypharmacy, seniors, medications, symptoms, and more.

Dangers

- Increased risk of hospitalization
- Increased risk of disability
- Increased risk of death
- Increased risk of confusion
- Increased risk of memory loss

If you think your grandma is on too many medications or if you have concerns about their health, please contact your doctor or pharmacist.

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