

Talk About Prescriptions - - It's a MUST, for everyone!

by [Teri Robert, PhD](#)

October is recognized as "Talk About Prescriptions" month. Each year, the [National Council on Patient Information and Education](#) (NCPPIE) sets a theme related to safe medication use and provides educational materials to help patients use medications safely and effectively. Their theme this year is targeted specifically at senior citizens, but offers outstanding information and advice for everyone.



This year's theme is ***"Talk About Prescriptions - - It's A MUST!"*** The purpose is four-fold with this year's observance:

1. To introduce a number of new NCPPIE educational resources to support our members' and other stakeholders' activities.
2. To call attention to the health and economic impact of medication misuse / nonadherence and the benefits of intervening to improve the dialogue about medication use and safety.
3. To encourage every affected person or group -- including consumers, healthcare professionals, pharmaceutical manufacturers, voluntary health agencies, and local, state and national government agencies to **get involved in promoting safe and appropriate medication use.**
4. **To suggest ways** that consumers -- especially older adults and their caregivers -- their healthcare providers, and public, private, and voluntary organizations can get involved to improve medication use and by doing so, improve medication adherence and better health outcomes.

America's aging baby boomer population is expected to swell to 71 million by 2030. Advances in drug therapies, coupled with health-promoting lifestyle choices (e.g., good nutrition, regular exercise, smoking cessation), can help older adults lead more active, healthy lives for longer. When used appropriately, prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications can enhance quality of life by limiting loss of function and alleviating troublesome symptoms, and even extend life.

Despite these benefits, all medications have risks, especially among older adults, who take more medications than any other age group in the United States. This group is more likely to experience serious side effects, which can result in additional illness, drug-related hospitalizations and even death. These side effects -- 25% of which are preventable, according to research -- may include falls, depression, confusion, hallucinations and malnutrition, which are more common in older adults. In addition, this group tends to have more than one prescribing healthcare provider and uses at least one pharmacy, making it more difficult to track all of their medications and identify potential problems (e.g., drug interactions, harmfully high doses, unnecessary medications that carry no health benefits).

The use of multiple medications is considered a leading drug safety issue among this patient population because of potential drug interactions or inappropriate prescribing. Data suggest 4 out of 5 older Americans live with one or more chronic conditions and 2 out of 5 report taking five or more prescription medications. Many have to follow complicated dosage regimens. Further compounding this are age-related physiological changes, memory impairments, as well as vision and hearing loss, which can result in greater drug sensitivity and exaggerated effects and challenges taking medications as prescribed.

Given all of these concerns, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) recently launched an interactive, national campaign called **Medication Use Safety Training for Seniors (MUST for Seniors)** and is featuring it during this year's Talk About Prescriptions Month.

The NCPIE has prepared excellent materials for this campaign with information that applies to all patients, not just seniors. For many people who need treatment for pain and other health issues, medications are an integral part of life. Using them properly enhances not only safety, but the effectiveness of the medications and the patients' quality of life.

Basic medication facts:

- A product is a medication or drug if it:
 - ✓ Changes the way your body works OR
 - ✓ Treats or prevents a disease
- Types of medications include:
 - ✓ Prescription medications such as blood pressure medications, antibiotics, or birth control pills
 - ✓ Over-the-Counter (OTC) drugs are medications you can buy without a prescription, including aspirin, acetaminophen, antacids, laxatives, cough medications, dietary supplements, and herbal remedies
- When used correctly, medications can lead to:
 - ✓ Better health
 - ✓ Improved quality of life
 - ✓ Longer life
- Medications can make us better and prevent illnesses. Medications also have risks. It's important to weigh the benefits and risks for each medication.

Tips for avoiding problems with medications:

- Learn about your health conditions and medications. Talk with your healthcare providers, including your pharmacist.
- Make a medication list that includes:
 - ✓ Names of all medications you use, including any TOCs, dietary supplements, and herbal remedies
 - ✓ Who prescribed each medication
 - ✓ What each medication is used for
 - ✓ How often and at what dose you take each
 - ✓ Whether refills are needed
- Be sure to update your list when a new medication is prescribed or if a dosage is changed.
- Make copies of your list:
 - ✓ Keep a copy available for your use at all times.
 - ✓ Take a copy with you to each and every healthcare appointment.
 - ✓ Give a copy of it to your family and your health emergency contacts.
- Be sure to review all of your medications with your primary physician at least once a year.

Each year, Talk About Prescriptions Month can serve as a timely reminder of the benefits and potential pitfalls of medications. It's a good time to review the medications you use, how you use them, and any problems or questions you may have. The NCPIE offers some very helpful free resources that you can download:

- [MUST for Seniors Booklet](#)

- [MUST for Seniors Participant's Worksheet](#): Complete this two-page Worksheet to check your medicine information awareness, or fill it out as you read the MUST for Seniors Booklet.
- [MUST for Seniors 10 Steps for Success](#): *New* downloadable resource. One-page handout with 10 important tips for safe medication use. Keep this handy item on your refrigerator, medicine cabinet mirror, or any other place where it can serve as a reminder to help you use medications correctly.

Live well; life safely!

Resources:

[National Council on Patient Information and Education](#) Web site.

[Medication Use Safety Training for Seniors Booklet](#).

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