

Script – Broadcast – Navigating polypharmacy as we age

INTRO

As we get older, the chances increase for many of us to develop chronic disease. That also means the likelihood of taking daily medications for conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, insomnia, arthritis and high cholesterol.

In medical terms, it's called polypharmacy.

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Jessica McCuen (MC-QUE-IN), manager of pharmacy operations, OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center, Rockford, Illinois

"Polypharmacy is using or taking multiple medications. Most healthcare professionals have agreed that the number is somewhere around five or more. Generally, we say anyone who's taking five or more medications is experiencing polypharmacy." (:17)

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Taking multiple prescription drugs can increase the risk of multi-drug interactions, in which one medication can affect another medication. Another potential concern is drug-disease interaction, where taking medication for one health issue can make another health problem worse.

It appears to be a bigger concern for older people. It's estimated that about one-third of adults between the ages of 60 and 70 are exhibiting some form of polypharmacy.

People who experience polypharmacy have a bigger risk of being tired and dizzy, which increases the risk for falls. Other symptoms are weakness, loss of appetite, gastrointestinal (GI) problems and skin rashes.

And it's not just prescription medications pharmacists worry about. Over-the-counter medications and herbal supplements can negatively interact with daily prescription drugs.

That's why it's important not to start any new medication without speaking to your care team. In fact, McCuen recommends doing a medication review with your physician or pharmacist at least once a year to make sure your medications mesh.

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Jessica McCuen (MC-QUE-IN), manager of pharmacy operations, OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center, Rockford, Illinois

"Your pharmacist is really your drug and medication expert," she says. "They know a lot about the drug interactions with all your medications." (:08)

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McCuen adds that it's also a good idea to use the same pharmacy whenever possible so that your pharmacist has a record of all the drugs that you're taking. That way if anything new is added they can intervene in the event you have an interaction with one of your other medications.