



POLYPHARMACY – AN OVERVIEW

1. What is polypharmacy?

Polypharmacy means using different medicines at the same time. These include medicines that are bought using a doctor's prescription or bought over-the-counter.

2. What are the problems that can happen because of polypharmacy?

Taking different medicines at the same time can lead to problems such as:

- Unnecessary side effects from using the medicines
- Waste of medicines
- Wrong use of medicines
- Using too little or too much medicines

3. Who has a high chance of problems with polypharmacy?

If you are 65 years old or older, you might be taking one or more medicines given to you by your doctor. You might also be taking some products that can be bought over-the-counter without a prescription. Taking these different medicines at the same time means that some of these medicines may interact with each other. This might cause some side effects and other dangerous effects.

If you take medicines given to you by your doctor and answer "yes" to any of the questions below, you may have a higher chance of problems with polypharmacy.

- Do you take herbs, vitamins or over-the-counter products?
- Do you have to take medicines more than once a day?
- Do you see different doctors for different medical conditions?
- Do you get your medicines from different pharmacies?
- Do you have poor eyesight or have difficulty hearing?
- Do you live alone?
- Do you sometimes forget to take your medicine?

4. What should I do?

Although taking different medicines at the same time can put you at a higher chance of unwanted medicine interactions and cause side effects, this problem can be handled as long as your doctor is informed of what medicines

you are taking. This allows your doctor to monitor your medicines carefully. The benefits of taking the different medicines at the same time can be more than the problems caused by it.

If you feel that you are taking too many medicines, you should talk to your doctor or pharmacist. There are many ways that you and your doctor or pharmacist can work together to reduce the problems caused by polypharmacy.

5. Some simple tips

- Talk to your doctor about your medicines
- Tell your doctor if you are taking any other medicines given by other doctors
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking medicines that do not require a prescription or any supplements such as herbs or vitamins.
- Write down the names of the medicines you are taking and show it to your doctor every time you see them. You can also write down any new symptoms or possible side effects that you experience as these information can help your doctor find out the cause of your problems.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about your medicines. Follow their instructions given by your doctor or pharmacist carefully.
- Do not share your medicines with other people or take medicines that belong to other people. Their medicines might not be suitable for you.
- You should always find out what medicines you are taking and why you are taking these medicines.

6. I am taking several medicines. How can I remember to take them all?

If you take several medicines daily, you need to have a medicine schedule. This will allow you to take your medicines at regular timings so that the amount of medicine in your body is maintained at a correct level. Ask your pharmacist to help you prepare a medicine schedule and remember to get a new copy every time your doctor changes your medicines or doses.

You can also buy products that can help with your medicine taking. Examples of such products include:

- A pill box with easy-to-open sections for each day of the week and the time for the medicine to be taken. This allows the medicines to be separated to allow you to take them easily instead of trying to remember the medicine doses each time.
- A product that uses an electronic alarm such as a buzzer, flashing light or that vibrates when it is time to take your medicine.

You can ask your pharmacist for help in choosing a product that suits you.

7. How should I store the medicine?

- Keep your medicines in the original container or packaging, tightly closed or sealed in a cool and dry place, away from direct sunlight.
- Keep the medicine out of reach of children.
- Throw away all expired medicines.