

Medicines

Managing the Impact of Medicine on Your Brain Health

Some groups of medicines may interfere with your brain function as you age. It's important to talk to your health care professional about their potential impact on your health.

Many older adults take medicines to:

- Help control diseases like diabetes and depression
- Manage risky conditions like high blood pressure and high cholesterol
- Manage chronic pain

While medicines can help you treat your health conditions, they may also affect you differently as you age.

- As you age, your body changes in ways that affect how you process and react to medicines.
- Your circulatory and digestive systems, liver, and kidneys slow down and can affect how fast medicines enter and leave your body.
- Weight changes may affect how much medicine you need and how long it stays in your body.
- Your medicines may interact with each other or with food, drink, vitamins, supplements, natural products, alcohol, or a health problem.

Some Medicines May Affect Your Brain

Groups of medicines that may interfere with brain function include some that treat:

- Allergies
- Anxiety
- Colds and flu
- Depression
- Sleeping problems
- Psychosis

Some of these medicines are sold over the counter. This means you can pick them up off the shelf without a doctor's order (or prescription).

Take Steps to Promote Brain Health

- Get regular advice from a health care professional about your medicines, especially before you make any changes in the way you take them. Abruptly stopping a medicine can be dangerous.

More Information

Talk to your health care professional about your medicines and their potential impact on your health and brain health. If necessary, talk about alternatives to your medicines.

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention webpage on [older adults and medicine side effects](#).

Review the National Institutes of Health [fact sheet on taking medications safely](#).

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It's important to know how to take your medications and what the side effects are.

- Any time you visit a health care professional, take along a list of your medicines plus over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, natural products and supplements you are taking.
- You need to describe any side effects that you think you may be experiencing.
- Learn about possible alternatives to medicines that may be causing problems.
- Ask your health professional some questions:
 - » What is the name of this medicine and why am I taking it?
 - » How should I take this medicine?
 - » How long will this medicine take to work?
 - » Is it okay to stop this medication sooner if I am feeling better?
 - » Does this medicine have any side effects on my body or brain and when should I call you about them?
 - » Could this medicine affect my brain? How can I protect myself against this?
 - » Can I safely mix this medicine with the remedies, vitamins, natural products, and other drugs I take? What about food or alcohol?
 - » Is there another drug or a non-drug treatment that might be safer or more effective for my body and brain?
 - » Do I still need to be on all my medicines?

Opioids

Older adults often receive opioid prescriptions for painful chronic conditions, even though these medicines are not the first line treatment for chronic pain. In addition, long term use of prescription opioids can be risky.

- If you use opioids for 90 days or longer, you may risk developing an opioid use disorder.
- Your prescription opioids may cause severe side effects, which can increase the risk of hospitalization.

There are effective pain management alternative treatments to opioids.

If you have an opioid use disorder, Medicare covers various treatments. Medicaid treatment is available, too, for those who qualify in their states. Veterans may have access to treatments for the disorder and to non-opioid treatments for pain through the Veterans Health Administration.

Programs available through Area Agencies on Aging and local providers offer chronic disease self-management techniques for coping with pain. Visit the [Eldercare Locator](#) or call 1-800-677-1116 to identify local resources.