

Healthy Aging



MEDICATIONS & ALCOHOL





Family, work, hobbies, travel... ALL this can keep you busy! Don't let problems with medications or alcohol slow you down. Take a few simple steps to get the most out of life!

STEP 1:

KNOW YOUR MEDICATIONS

Medications should help you feel better or keep you healthy. Are you taking the right medication, at the right dose, at the right time, in the right way?

Taking medications correctly may help you to:

- Avoid side effects
- Prevent dangerous interactions (poor effects) with alcohol

Get the most out of your medicines by not drinking any alcohol.

If you take a medication for pain:

- Do not drink while on any pain medication from your doctor.
- Do not take extra medication.
- Talk to your doctor about adjusting your dosage to properly manage your pain over time.

Here are some tips to help you keep track of your medications:

Make a list of your medications, including those from your doctor, over-the-counter medicines (OTCs), herbal, and dietary supplements.

Note:

- What you take
- When you take it
- Why you take it
- How you take it



If you ever drink alcohol and are started on a new medication, you can ask your doctor: “Could there be a dangerous interaction if I drink alcohol while taking this medication?”

Consider using a medication chart:

- Checking off each dose on a daily list can help you stay on track.
- Bring your list, chart, or all your medications to all of your doctor visits. Ask your doctor if you are taking the right amount and if you still need to take it.

And remember!

- Take medications only as directed. If you have any questions or side effects, contact your health care provider.
- Don't share medications with others.
- Your doctor, nurse, and pharmacist can answer your questions.

“Over-the-counter” medications (OTCs) and supplements can also cause interactions with other medications and side effects. OTCs and supplements include anything you can buy without a prescription, such as:

- Aspirin and other pain relievers
- Cold or allergy medicine
- Antacids
- Laxatives
- Vitamins and minerals
- Herbal and dietary supplements

STEP 2:

FIND OUT THE FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL

Did you know?

- Alcohol breaks down more slowly in your body as you age, making the effects of alcohol stronger and longer-lasting.
- Alcohol interacts with some prescriptions and OTCs.
- Alcohol can make health problems worse, such as high blood pressure, acid reflux, liver disease, diabetes, and dementia.
- Alcohol can lead to falls, trouble sleeping, and heart problems.

You can help prevent problems that can be caused by alcohol.

If you plan to drink a small amount of alcohol on a special occasion, it's important to know how it may affect you.

Talk with your doctor or nurse to find out:

- If alcohol is safe for you
- How much is safe for you to drink
- If alcohol will interact with your medications



A standard drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor.

If you plan to drink alcohol, the limits are different now that you are over 65, even if you are not taking any medications.

- **Healthy men 65 or older:** The way your body now digests alcohol means that your reaction will be stronger and will last longer. It is important to talk to your health care provider about whether you can safely drink alcohol and how much.
- **Healthy women 65 or older:** Women's bodies react more strongly to alcohol. Talk to your health care provider about whether you can safely drink alcohol and how much.

Drinking more than the recommended limit is considered unhealthy.

Here are more tips for preventing interactions with medications:

- Let your doctor or nurse know if you drink alcohol, even if it's just once in a while.
- Do not use alcohol if you take sleeping pills; pain pills; cough or cold medicine; acetaminophen (Tylenol®); pills for anxiety (nerves) or depression; or other medications that might cause an interaction.
- Look for warning labels on medications. Read the information that comes with each medication or talk with your pharmacist. Choose medications that don't contain alcohol, if possible.
- Choose to drink water or a non-alcoholic drink instead of alcohol.
- If you don't drink alcohol now, don't start.



STEP 3:

WATCH OUT FOR PROBLEMS

The tips in this brochure can help you prevent medication mistakes and problems with alcohol.

Some signs of problems you can watch for:

- Memory troubles
- Unsteadiness on your feet, falls, accidents
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Mood swings or feeling sad

If you think you might have a problem with alcohol or another substance, talk with someone who can help. You can talk with a doctor, nurse, or family member. You can also ask questions or get referrals by calling the Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline at toll-free: 1-800-327-5050 | TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370.

If you think someone you know is having a problem with medications or alcohol:

- Let the person know that you care and that you are concerned. Explain why, such as, “The last time I saw you, you seemed to have trouble keeping your balance.”
- Encourage the person to talk with a health care provider or someone else who can help.

To protect yourself, your loved ones, and your pets, it is best to keep your medicines in a locked or secure place.

To dispose of unused medications in a safer way:*

- Keep medications in their original containers. Leave drug names visible to help identify the contents if they are accidentally swallowed. Cross



- out other personal information on labels to make it unreadable.
- Disguise the medications in their containers:
 - For pills: add some water or soda to dissolve them.
 - For liquids: add inedible material like cat litter, coffee grounds, or dirt.
- Close the lids and secure with tape.
- Check www.mass.gov/DrugDropbox to see if there is a permanent medication collection site in your town or city. If not, hide medication containers in the trash. DO NOT put them in your recycle bin!

**The information sheet that came with your medication may tell you to flush it down the drain. For instance, these drugs should be flushed away because they are dangerous to other people and pets:*

Actiq (fentanyl citrate)

Daytrana Transdermal Patch (methylphenidate)

Duragesic Transdermal System (fentanyl)

OxyContin Tablets (oxycodone)

Avinza Capsules (morphine sulfate)

Baraclude Tablets (entecavir)

Reyataz Capsules (atazanavir sulfate)

Tequin Tablets (gatifloxacin)

Zerit for Oral Solution (stavudine)

Meperidine HCl Tablets

Percocet

(Oxycodone and Acetaminophen)

Xyrem (Sodium Oxybate)

Fentora (fentanyl buccal tablet)

STEP 4:

GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

Getting support — and giving support to others — can be good ways to prevent problems and stay healthy.

Here are some suggestions:

- If you have questions, getting help can be just a phone call away. Use the resources listed in this section.
- Get involved in free or low-cost activities at a recreational or senior center, place of worship, or other organization.
- Help others, volunteer.
- Pursue hobbies: work in a garden, cook, read, or listen to books on tape.
- Make new friends. Saying “hello” is often enough to start a friendship.

Resources

MEDICATION INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

Massachusetts Prescription Advantage Program

Toll-free: 1-800-AGE-INFO or 1-800-243-4636
www.800ageinfo.com

Information on the state’s prescription medication program for elders and other elder services and programs, including local senior centers

MCPHS Pharmacy Outreach Program

Toll-free: 1-866-633-1617
www.mcphs.edu/pharmacyoutreach

Information about free or low-cost prescription programs and answers to health and medication questions; interpreter services available

**Regional Center for Poison
Control and Prevention serving
Massachusetts and Rhode Island**

Toll-free: 1-800-222-1222

TTY: 1-888-244-5313

www.maripoisoncenter.com

24 hours a day

Information and hotline about
possible overdoses or poisonings
(In immediate danger call 911 or
your local emergency number)

**SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER
INFORMATION & TREATMENT**

**Massachusetts Substance
Abuse Information and
Education Helpline**

Toll-free: 1-800-327-5050

TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or
1-800-439-2370

www.helpline-online.com

*Seven days a week, interpreter
services available*

Information and referrals on
alcohol and drug abuse
services, self-help programs,
and related concerns

HEALTH INFORMATION

**Massachusetts Health
Promotion Clearinghouse**

Toll-free: 1-800-952-6637

TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or
1-800-439-2370

www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse

Free copies of this brochure and
other resources in many languages

**Massachusetts Department
of Public Health, Division of
Prevention and Wellness**

1-617-624-5070

TTY: 1-617-624-5992

[www.mass.gov/dph/
healthpromotion](http://www.mass.gov/dph/healthpromotion)

Information on opportunities for
older people to learn more about
their health

**Commonwealth of
Massachusetts Department
of Public Health**

