

High-risk medications: information for seniors

UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF AGING IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR WELL-BEING



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates the number of senior citizens in America will double by 2050.¹ This growth is due to advances in healthcare and the promotion of healthy aging.

♥ What are some of aging's effects?

As you get older, your body undergoes changes. Some changes you may experience include:^{2,3}

- Changes in sleep
- Changes in eating and digestive habits
- Reduced functional ability
- Decrease in vision and hearing
- Changes in memory and thinking
- Bone and muscle loss
- Changes in how the body handles medicines

While these changes could present challenges, the good news is there are resources that can help you. Here we offer more information on high-risk medications, potential alternative medicine, questions to ask your doctor and tips for healthy aging.

🔗 What is a high-risk medication?

Not everyone reacts to medicines in the same way.³ Your friend may take a medicine that works well, but it might not work for you at all—even if you both have the same medical condition. Or a medicine that you take easily may cause side effects for your neighbor.

It's always smart to know how the medicines you take should make you feel and what negative side effects to watch for. As people get older, their bodies respond differently to everything, including food, medicine and supplements. Some medicines are called high-risk medications because they can cause harmful side effects, including falls, confusion, sleepiness and weakness.

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Commonly prescribed high-risk medications and possible alternatives^{4,8}

High-risk medication	Conditions these medications help treat	Potential side effects	Possible alternatives
Amitriptyline	Depression Insomnia Neuropathic pain Fibromyalgia	Sleepiness Weakness Dizziness Dry mouth Constipation Blurred vision	Depression: Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs): escitalopram, fluvoxamine, sertraline, citalopram;* serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs): duloxetine, venlafaxine Insomnia: trazodone Belsomra Neuropathic pain: gabapentin, duloxetine
Carisoprodol Cyclobenzaprine Metaxalone Methocarbamol	Muscle spasms	Sleepiness Increased risk of falls and fractures Nausea	baclofen tizanidine
Digoxin (daily doses greater than 0.125 mg)	Atrial fibrillation Heart failure	Dizziness Confusion Vision changes Nausea Vomiting	Adjust other heart failure medications
Estrogen-containing products	Hormone treatments	Increased risk of breast or endometrial cancers NOTE: Taking this medication does not offer protection from an event like heart attack or stroke	Hot flashes: sertraline, venlafaxine or citalopram* Dryness: Estrace cream, Premarin cream Bone health: alendronate, raloxifene, calcium, vitamin D
Glyburide	Diabetes	Low blood sugar Nausea Dizziness	glimepiride glipizide
Zolpidem Zaleplon Eszopiclone (Greater than 90-day supply total in one year)	Insomnia and trouble sleeping	Sleepiness Confusion Increased risk of falls and fractures	Nonmedication: better sleep habits Medication: trazodone or Belsomra

*Citalopram 20 mg/d is the maximum dose for those 60 years and older. Citalopram (Celexa) Prescribing Information See: Dosage and Administration: Special Populations Section:
http://pi.actavis.com/data_stream.asp?product_group=1906&p=pi&language=E

Ask your healthcare provider for a complete list of high-risk medications. If you are on any of the medications listed above, talk to your healthcare provider. Even if you are not experiencing any side effects, there may be better and/or safer alternatives to prevent potential side effects in the future.

Your healthcare provider can see a complete list of high-risk medications by visiting [Humana.com/DrugLists](https://www.humana.com/druglists) and then selecting the “Medications to avoid in the elderly” link.



Ask your doctor about your high-risk medications

- What is my medication for?
- How should I take my medicines?
- Is there anything I need to avoid while taking my medicines?
- Are my medicines truly necessary or is one drug being used to treat a side effect of another drug?
- What are the benefits, as well as side effects, of my medicines?
- Even though I am not currently experiencing any symptoms, am I at an increased risk of harmful side effects from taking this medication?
- Is it possible to switch my high-risk medication to a safer alternative?
- Can my medicines increase the risk of falls?
- Do my medicines have an impact on my sleep?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?

Always have an updated list of medicines to give to your healthcare providers. Include all prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbals and supplements.

Tips for healthy aging

Despite the changes that occur, there are many things you can do to age happily and healthfully.

- Keep a positive attitude. Focus on the things you have to be grateful for, and persevere through hard times.
- Stay active. Regular exercise can help maintain a healthy body weight, keep your heart in shape and boost your mood.
- Stay mentally active. Read books, do crossword puzzles, find a new hobby and play games that challenge your mind.
- Eat a healthy diet. Focus on getting lots of fresh fruits and vegetables with moderate amounts of whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts while staying within your daily calorie needs.
- Don't smoke. Smoking is linked to several dangerous health conditions. If you currently smoke, talk to your doctor about how to quit.
- Stay socially active. Talk to your friends and family regularly.

If you're having trouble sleeping, follow these tips:⁵

- Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day
- Spend a little bit of time in the sunshine every day
- Avoid exercise, alcohol and caffeine four to six hours before bed
- Avoid watching television before bed
- Don't nap after 2 p.m. and keep naps short
- If you're hungry before bed, eat a healthy, light snack
- Sleep in a comfortable bed and keep the room cool and dark at night

Follow these steps to help prevent slips and falls:^{6,7}

- Wear properly-fitting shoes and tie shoelaces well
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D
- Remove items that you could trip over
- Get your vision checked every year
- Install handrails on stairs, inside the bathtub and next to the toilet
- Use nonslip mats throughout your house
- Improve the lighting in your home
- Use a cane or walker
- Use a night light
- Check blood pressure in a lying and standing position
- Consider an exercise or physical therapy program
- Secure loose rugs and move furniture out of high-traffic areas

This material is provided for informational use only and should not be construed as medical advice or used in place of consulting a licensed medical professional. You should consult with your doctor to determine what is right for you.

References

- ¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The State of Aging and Health in America 2013. Atlanta, GA:Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Dept of Health and Human Services; 2013
- ²Changes in the body with aging. Merck Manuals. Revised May 2017. Retrieved from: www.merckmanuals.com/home/older-people's-health-issues/the-aging-body/changes-in-the-body-with-aging
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- ⁴Humana. Medications to avoid in the elderly. Retrieved from: apps.humana.com/marketing/documents.asp?file=1578031
- ⁵Bloom HG, Ahmed I, Alessi CA, et al. Evidence-based recommendations for the assessment and management of sleep disorders in older persons. J Am Geriatr Soc. 2009;57:761-789.
- ⁶American Geriatrics Society, British Geriatrics Society. AGS/BGS clinical practice guideline: prevention of falls in older persons. New York (NY): American Geriatrics Society; 2010. Various p.
- ⁷Humana Falls Prevention Campaign
- ⁸The American Geriatrics Society 2015 Beers Criteria Update Expert Panel (2015). American Geriatrics Society 2015 Updated Beers Criteria for Potentially Inappropriate Medication Use in Older Adults. Journal of the American Geriatrics Society. DOI: 10.1111/jgs.13702. Retrieved from: www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jgs.13702/full



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Complaint forms are available at **<https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/office/file/index.html>**.

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Call the number on your ID card (TTY: 711)

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