

MEDICATIONS & DRIVING: SAFETY TIPS FOR OLDER ADULTS & THEIR FAMILIES

Most older adults and their families are well aware of the hazards of drinking alcohol and driving. What they may not know is that certain prescription and non-prescription medications can also affect driving skills. Nearly eighty percent of people over 55 take at least one – and frequently more than one – prescription or over-the-counter medication, according to a recent study conducted by the Center for Injury Sciences at the University of Alabama, Birmingham and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

The study also showed that less than a third of these older drivers know that certain medications can affect their ability to drive safely. Only 18 percent of the older participants in the study said that a physician or other health care provider had warned them about the effects of medicines on driving. Most caregivers of older people aren't aware of the possible hazards of taking medications and driving.

DRUGS THAT AFFECT DRIVING

Prescription medications that can affect driving skills include:

- Drugs to manage anxiety or insomnia
- Insulin
- Antispasmodics for ulcers
- Pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medications
- High blood pressure drugs and diuretics (“water pills”)
- Antibiotics prescribed for infections and allergies
- Certain medications for congestive heart failure
- Antidepressants

Certain over-the-counter medicines contain ingredients that can also make driving unsafe:

- Antihistamines
- Decongestants
- Cough syrup
- Diarrhea remedies
- Pills for motion sickness
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FIND THE FACTS ABOUT MEDICATION INTERACTIONS

Like many older adults your parent probably takes a variety of medicines every day to manage disease symptoms and stay healthy. Being able to drive is very important to most older adults. Your parent may rely on his ability to drive to visit friends, shop for groceries, go to church, or hold down a part time job.

Take time to sit down with your older relative and review all the medicines he or she takes – including those he takes regularly or only when he needs them. Encourage him to discuss his medications – both prescription and non-prescription -- with the doctor and how they may affect driving abilities.

Pharmacists are also excellent sources of information about prescription and non-prescription drugs. They can advise patients about the correct way to take medicines and tell your parent if any of them might affect driving. Many large pharmacies offer information about commonly used prescription and non-prescription medicines – including drug interactions -- on their websites.

FOR CAREGIVERS –

Encourage your older relative to take along a bag of all his medicines – both prescription and non-prescription – to appointments with his primary care doctor. Be sure to include medicines prescribed by other doctors who also treat your relative. The doctor can advise your relative about possible side effects and interactions.

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