

# Watch for Medication Side Effects

Medications or combinations of medications can make you confused, less alert, or affect your thinking. Examples include medicines used to treat:

- Allergies and colds (antihistamines)
- Anxiety and depression (antidepressants)
- Bladder control (anticholinergics)
- Pain
- Parkinson's disease
- Sleep problems
- Spasms or seizures

## Non-Prescription Drugs and Side Effects

Side effects are not limited to prescription drugs. Many non-prescription medications (“over-the-counter” drugs) can cause confusion and disorientation. These include most sleep aids, some cold medications, and medications for allergies.

## Older Adults and Side Effects

Older people are more likely to suffer from side effects because:

- The body’s ability to remove drugs decreases with age, which results in a buildup of drugs in the body
- Many older adults take multiple medications at the same time and side effects may result due to complicated interactions between different drugs or between drugs and food
- Increased sensitivity to medications can affect the brain and nerves

## What you can do:

- If you think your medication is causing problems, contact your doctor, pharmacist, or provider before you stop taking them (unless they are causing an allergic reaction)
- Stopping a medication may cause problems; some medications require a gradual stoppage and others may cause withdrawal symptoms
- If you have questions about any medicine (prescribed or over-the-counter) and possible side effects, ask your doctor or pharmacist
- If you started a new medicine and think you are having side effects, call your doctor right away – your doctor may change the dosage, the medicine, or have you stop taking the medicine. Sometimes, an office visit may *not* be needed.

