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.