

# PoisonPreventionPress

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## Preventing Medicine Misadventures

Follow these medicine safety tips:

- Keep an up-to-date list of medicines, including prescription, over-the-counter (OTC), herbals and vitamins
- Review medicine list with doctors and pharmacists
- Ask pharmacists for help when choosing OTC medicines to avoid drug interactions
- Read the label every time a medicine is taken
- Follow directions exactly and never stop taking a medicine without talking to the doctor first
- Use daily pill reminders or charts to help keep track of medicine doses
- Never take someone else's medicine
- Discard unused and expired medicine

## Did you know that...

- Nationwide, seniors account for 7-8% of calls to poison center, but 20% of deaths ?
- Of the 2,800 calls to the MPC about patients 60 years and older, 66% were about women ?



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## MPC Top 10 Exposures in Seniors

Often when people think about using the services of the Maryland Poison Center (MPC), they picture small children getting into household products and medicine. But young children only account for 44% of calls to our poison center. That means that teens, adults and senior account for 56% of our calls. Let's take a look at the top 10 substances that people 60 years and older were exposed to before calling the MPC.

**10. Antimicrobials** Antibiotics and antiviral medicines taken by mouth, as well as ointments and drops for the skin, eyes and ears, are included in this category. And while usually these exposures are not a problem, seniors should know to call the poison center just to make sure.

**9. Anticholinergic medicines** This broad category includes medicines that can be used for Parkinson's Disease, relief of cramps or spasms of the stomach, intestines and bladder, and some eye and lung conditions. Symptoms from dosing errors are possible, so the poison center should be called right away to determine what, if any, treatment is needed.

**8. Anticonvulsants** These are medicines used to treat seizures. Sometimes the poison center is called because of dosing errors. Other times, we are called because the medicine level has built up in the blood leading to side effects. The poison center should also be called if the patient can't remember if they took their medicine. Poison experts will help decide if the dose should be skipped or taken.

**7. Gastrointestinal medicines** Medicine in this category could be used to prevent stomach symptoms or can be used to relieve stomach upset. They are commonly found in many homes. In most cases, serious effects will not be seen with overdoses of medicine in this category.

**6. Household cleaning products** Everyone has cleaning products in their home. Exposures can be from skin contact, breathing the fumes, having the product splash in the eye or mistaking it for a beverage. It is important to never mix multiple household cleaners together. Dangerous fumes can be formed. If possible, household cleaners should be stored away from food to avoid mistaking a cleaner for food or drink.

**5. Cosmetics and personal care products** Hydrogen peroxide, denture cleaners, mouthwash, creams and lotions and soap are at the top of the list for exposures in this category. Some exposures result from seniors not putting on their glasses. Others are because the product is mistakenly swallowed rather than spit out. Most calls regarding these products are handled at home.

**4. Hormones** This category includes diabetes and thyroid medicines. Dosing errors with these medicines are very common. Poison specialists can help with insulin errors by helping a patient track their blood sugar. The poison center should be called right away if a dosing error is suspected. Some medicines in this category can lead to serious symptoms when taken in overdose, so even a double dose should be reported to the poison center.

**3. Sedatives and antipsychotic medicines** These medicines are a common reason for calling the poison center, as well as a common cause of falls in seniors. Dosing errors should be managed with the assistance of the poison specialists.

**2. Analgesics (pain relievers)** It is important to read over-the-counter medicine labels carefully to make sure the proper dose is taken and to make sure multiple products with the same ingredients are not taken at the same time. The same precautions should be taken with prescription pain medicines. Call the poison center right away if a medicine error occurs with pain medicines.

**1. Heart medicines** There are many different types of heart medicines. The one thing most of them have in common is that medicine errors should be managed right away with the help of the experts at the poison center. With some heart medicines, even a double dose would need to be treated in the hospital.

The take home message is that nobody is too old to be poisoned. Seniors should be aware that poison centers are not just for young children. The pharmacists and nurses at the Maryland Poison Center are available 24/7 by calling 1-800-222-1222 to help with drug information, as well as poison emergencies.