



Maryland Poison Center  
University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

1-800-222-1222

# Poison

# Prevention Press

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## Poison Prevention Tips for Seniors

- Turn on the lights and put glasses on to read product labels each time a medicine or product is used.
- Keep products in their original containers and do not store non-food products near food.
- See your doctor regularly and have recommended blood tests done as directed.
- If you cannot remember if you took your medicine, do not guess. Call the poison center right away for advice.
- Use one pharmacy to fill prescriptions and make sure all of your doctors know all of the medicines you are taking.
- Use a system to help you remember to take your medicine as directed (daily pill organizer, charts, etc.)

## Did you know that...

People >65 years account for 13% of the population, but take 33% of prescription medicines.

In 2009, the top 3 non-drug substances seniors called the Maryland Poison center about were household cleaners, personal care products and pesticides, while heart medicines, analgesics and sleep medicines were the top 3 drug substances.

## Poison Help for Seniors

Seniors do not need the services of the Maryland Poison Center, right? They don't have young children in their homes on a regular basis. They have a lifetime of experience and know how to use household products. Unfortunately, this is a common sentiment for many seniors. The fact is seniors **do** need the services of the poison center.

First, we must expand the usual definition of "poisoning". Poisons are not simply household cleaners that children drink. Anything that is taken into the body in an amount that is incorrect or in a manner that is unintended is a poison. This includes personal care products and medicine. Take the following examples of calls to the poison center from seniors:

"I placed my medicine and my husband's medicine on the kitchen counter. He thought it was meant for him and took both of our medicines!"

"I didn't put my glasses on to brush my teeth and I accidentally put arthritis rub on my toothbrush rather than toothpaste!"

"I just picked my medicine up from the pharmacy. Usually my pressure pills are blue and my sugar pills are green. Today they look different."

"I was gargling with hydrogen peroxide and the cat jumped up and startled me. I accidentally swallowed the peroxide."

Seniors often take multiple medications. This puts them at risk for drug interactions. It also means that they must have a system or a routine that enables them to take their medicine properly. If a senior forgets whether or not they have taken a medicine, there could be severe outcomes if they take a second dose too soon or skip a dose. The poison center can help a senior manage this situation.

As we age, our bodies undergo changes; some of these are noticeable, others are not. Eyesight diminishes with age making it more difficult to read product labels. Changes in liver and kidney function can affect how medicines are metabolized and eliminated. This can lead to medicines building up in the system of a senior, putting them at risk of adverse effects from the medicine.

While 50% of calls that come into the poison center pertain to children, they do not usually have bad outcomes. Seniors account for approximately 5% of calls to poison centers nationwide, but they account for 13% of deaths due to poisoning. Do not let seniors in your family or community become part of this statistic.

Seniors should be reminded of the services of poison centers. Staffed by pharmacists and nurses 24/7, the Maryland Poison Center is a resource for **everyone** and it's just a phone call away. Call **1-800-222-1222** anytime a poisoning or overdose is suspected.

