

HEALTH, WELLNESS & SAFETY MAGAZINE

# HWS

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## INSIDE

### FEATURE

FROM TOTS TO TEENS

### NOT FOR PROFIT

DRUMMOND HOUSE

### THE INTERVIEW

REID COOLSAET

COVER STORY P16

# BURLINGTON DENTURE CLINIC

Peter Iapichino DD  
is helping his patients  
to eat better, enjoy life,  
and smile with  
confidence.

Photo: Peter Iapichino DD

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## Managing your meds: tips for seniors

“Managing you or your loved one’s medications is a crucial component of managing overall health and well-being.”

By Dani DePetrillo



**MEDICATIONS HELP PREVENT** and treat illness and disease, but increasingly among seniors, mismanaging medications are causing adverse drug reactions.

As people age, they are more likely to be prescribed more than one kind of prescription medication and many seniors are taking three, four or more. The more prescriptions a senior has to manage the more chance there is for mix-ups and adverse reactions.

It is estimated that adverse reactions to prescription drugs in seniors hospitalized in Ontario each year costs \$13.6 million. In a study published by the Canadian Institute of Health Research in 2011, 51% of all emergency department visits each year are due to adverse reactions to medications in adults aged 50 and

over. Among seniors, 62% are on five or more drugs, while almost 30% aged 85 or older are taking 10 or more drugs daily.

Anyone can encounter dangerous drug reactions or an accidental overdose, but older adults are at a higher risk. Seniors typically face multiple health conditions that call for multiple medications. The more medications you take, the more likely it is for these varied drugs to negatively interact. As our bodies age they don’t absorb and metabolize drugs as well, and this can create adverse affects too.

Managing your medications with the right dosage, combination and times taken can be overwhelming to many people. Many seniors struggle with vision, hearing and even memory loss, and that creates an even bigger challenge for seniors trying to manage all their medications.

Seniors should consider asking for help

managing their medication from their family, caregiver, doctor or pharmacist if they:

- ▶ Live alone, or live with an aging spouse.
- ▶ Take three or more medications including non-prescription medicine and herbal or dietary supplements.
- ▶ Have memory problems or are not as aware of time passages as they used to be.
- ▶ Get prescriptions from more than one doctor (including specialists, emergency rooms, walk-in clinics and nurse practitioners).
- ▶ Fill prescriptions at more than one pharmacy.

We see many cases of seniors taking not only multiple medications, but having three or more pharmacies involved too. Not only do seniors have different medications being prescribed by different doctors, they’re filling them from different pharmacies. No one knows all the medications that someone’s on. This is where a Care Manager and/or a family member are critical in ensuring that the health and well-being of seniors are being monitored and looked after.

To safeguard against harmful drug reactions, here are some suggestions:

- ▶ Ask questions to understand how medications should be taken. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to provide written instructions.
- ▶ Use only one pharmacy so you have a proper record of all medications being prescribed, and have your medication reviewed regularly.
- ▶ Ask for “blister packs”—special packaging for medications that make managing them easier.
- ▶ Work with your doctor to recognize and report potential side effects of each medication you take.
- ▶ Team up with relatives and caregivers to ensure you take appropriate doses.
- ▶ At least twice a year, bring your physician to review and adjust the dosage of your medications and discontinue any unnecessary ones.

Managing you or your loved one’s medications is a crucial component of managing overall health and well-being. **HWS**

Dani DePetrillo is vice-president of health care services for Right at Home Canada.

Right at Home Canada provides in-home care and assistance—including a comprehensive Wellness Program, companionship, personal care and skilled nursing services—to those who need extra help to maintain their independence. For more information, please visit Right At Home Canada at [www.rightathomecanada.com](http://www.rightathomecanada.com) or call 905.331.HOME (4663) ext. 706.