

5 Questions to Ask About My Multiple Medications

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to help make decisions together with my doctor, nurse practitioner, or pharmacist



Taking multiple medications usually means taking 5 or more medications

What is the purpose of each of my medications?

Could I be experiencing any side effects or drug interactions?

Could lifestyle changes also improve my well-being?

Are all my medications needed?

What other information should I know about my medications?

For more information about the 5 Questions:



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Institut pour la sécurité des médicaments aux patients du Canada

deprescribing.org
Reducing medications safely to meet life's changes

CDA-AMC Canada's Drug Agency
L'Agence des médicaments du Canada



A toolkit for people who take multiple medications



Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada
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Reducing medications safely to meet life's changes | Moins de médicaments, sécuritairement – pour mieux répondre aux défis de la vie



Canada's Drug Agency
L'Agence des médicaments du Canada

About the 5 Questions and Toolkit

The resources were created to help improve the appropriate use of medications.

[ISMP Canada](#) co-created these resources with patients, caregivers, health care providers, [Canada's Drug Agency](#), [deprescribing.org](#), and with input from members of the [Appropriate Use Coalition](#).

Funding was provided by [Canada's Drug Agency](#).



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Voices of Patients and Caregivers

Top 10 responses when patients,
who take multiple medications,
were asked:

***“When you think of
multiple medications, what
words come to mind?”***



A word cloud within a rounded rectangle, featuring the following terms: 'ask questions' (large, red), 'side effects' (large, blue), 'complicated' (medium, blue), 'timing' (vertical, blue), 'interactions' (medium, red), 'time consuming' (medium, red), 'confusing' (medium, blue), 'lack of education' (medium, red), 'expensive' (medium, blue), and 'overwhelming' (medium, blue).

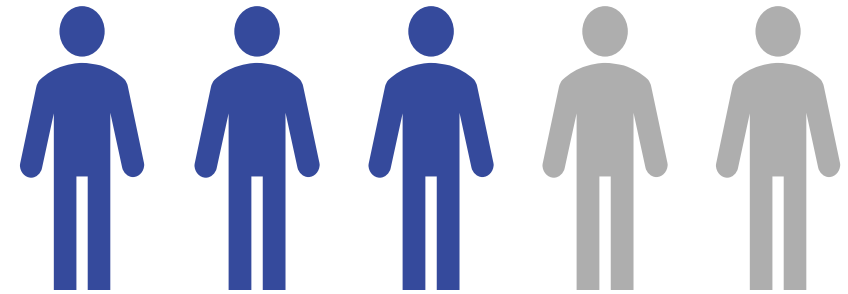
time consuming
interactions confusing
ask questions
side effects
timing
complicated
lack of education expensive
overwhelming

Multiple Medications

Taking multiple medications (also called polypharmacy by health care providers) usually means taking 5 or more medications

People may be taking medications that are:

- no longer needed
- not having the desired effect for health and well-being
- causing harm (e.g., side effects, drug interactions)



**3 out of 5 Canadians
over the age of 65 take
at least 5 different
prescription medications**

Reference: [CIHI](#), 2018

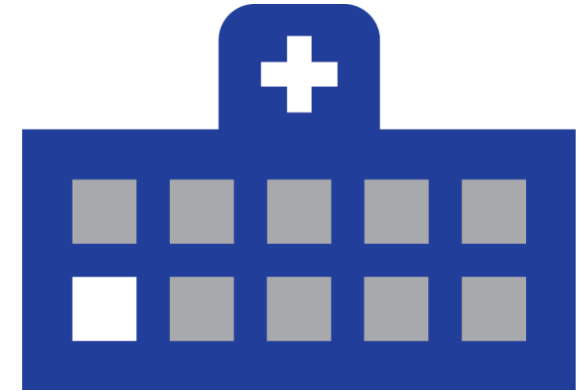
Multiple Medications

Many Canadians require multiple medications to maintain or improve their health.

As the number of medications increase, the risk of potential problems increases as well.

Taking multiple medications can cause problems such as:

- Confusion and falls
- Side effects
- Drug interactions
- Hospitalizations
- Decreased quality of life
- Financial burden



About **1 in 10 hospital admissions**, in older adults, are related to side effects of a medication

Reference: [Parameswaran Nair, et. al, 2017](#)

Judith Maxwell – Her Journey with Multiple Medications

Judith was a vibrant woman who loved being busy with her family, traveling, teaching music, art, and playing in five swing and jazz bands.

In 2008, all of that changed. She described herself as “surviving undiagnosed, serious adverse reactions to medications.”

With help from her pharmacist and cardiologist, it was confirmed that the atrial fibrillation she was experiencing may have been caused by some of her medications.

Over time, her medications were slowly reduced to a minimum, and she began to regain the lifestyle she loved.

Judith learned and shared how important it is to talk with health care providers about your medications.

Judith has since passed away. She was an incredible champion for medication safety. Judith’s story is shared with permission from her family.



Listen to [Judith's story](#)

5 Questions to Ask About My Multiple Medications

- Asking these 5 questions can help you make decisions together with your doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist.
- It's a way for you to know what's working well, and what might need attention.
- It can help you be more involved in decisions about your health and stay safe with your multiple medications.

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Could I be experiencing any side effects or drug interactions?

Could lifestyle changes also improve my well-being?

Are all my medications needed?

What other information should I know about my medications?

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5 Questions Explained

The following slides provide information to help you understand each question.

The questions can be used to ask yourself and/or your doctor, nurse practitioner, and pharmacist.



What is the purpose of each of my medications?

Medications can be used to treat or prevent a medical condition.

It is important to know the purpose of each medication so that you can check if they are working well.

"Working well" can mean different things to different people.

What does it mean for you? What matters most to you?



Remember to bring an updated list of all your medications including non-prescription medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Write down the reasons why you take each of your medications.

Could I be experiencing any side effects or drug interactions?



A side effect is a reaction to medication, for example, dizziness.

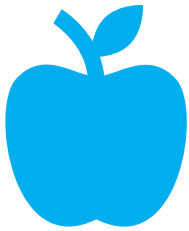


Sometimes medications can interact with each other and cause problems. For example, increased risk of bleeding or low blood pressure.



Always check with your doctor, nurse practitioner, and pharmacist before starting, changing, or stopping any of your medications.

Could lifestyle changes also improve my well-being?



Lifestyle changes can sometimes lead to a reduced medication dose or can replace a medication.



Talk with your doctor, nurse practitioner, and pharmacist about lifestyle changes like exercise, diet, or treatments such as physiotherapy.



Always check with your doctor, nurse practitioner, and pharmacist before starting, changing, or stopping any of your medications.

Are all my medications needed?

Your medications may need to change over time, for a variety of reasons. Sometimes medications are no longer needed because your health has changed.

Knowing the benefits (purpose), the possible risks (side effects or drug interactions), and possible lifestyle changes helps to inform decisions about medications.



When you talk with your care team, bringing a family member or friend to listen and take notes can be helpful.

What other information should I know about my medications?

Your doctor, nurse practitioner, or pharmacist might have additional information that is important for you to know, for example:

- safely managing your medication routine
- things to watch for (such as new symptoms)



You can make an appointment to talk with your doctor, nurse practitioner, or pharmacist about your medications.



You can ask your pharmacist for information about your medications, including if they are covered by a program, and alternative options.



Spread the Word

- Share this information with someone you know who is taking multiple medications.
- Tell us about your experience using the questions and the toolkit.
- Email:
AppropriateUse@cda-amc.ca

Additional Resources



- [Talking about your medications](#)
- [What matters to you?](#)
- When starting a new medication: [5 Questions to Ask](#)
- [Best Possible Medication History Interview Guide](#) can help you complete your [medication record](#) to prepare for your appointment.
- Resources about possibly reducing or stopping a medication: [deprescribingnetwork.ca](#) and [deprescribing.org](#)
- Learn from others who share their [experiences](#) with multiple medications.
- Learn about safe medication use and report medication errors to [mederror.ca](#)
- Report drug reactions to [Health Canada](#)