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RHODE ISLAND SENIOR BEAT

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KNOW HOW TO USE YOUR MEDICATIONS SAFELY

CRANSTON--- There are more than 39 million persons age 65 or older in the United States and more than 156,000 in Rhode Island. A significant number of seniors use prescription drugs to help them control chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis or heart problems. In many cases, seniors are dealing with multiple disease conditions and are taking a variety of drugs to treat these conditions. While prescription medications may enhance the quality of life for seniors, interaction between drugs can cause serious complications.

In general, drugs react differently in seniors than in younger persons. Part of the reason is that changes occur in body make-up as we age. The metabolism changes. The kidneys and our liver, two organs that are responsible for breaking down drugs and removing them from our system, slow down. The drugs remain in the system for a longer period of time.

When you talk to your doctor or pharmacist, give them a precise list, including the dose and frequency of all the medications you are taking. Keep a copy of this with you at all times. This is particularly important for seniors who may have more than one doctor or use more than one pharmacy. Be sure to tell your doctor or pharmacist immediately about any adverse reactions that you may experience when taking a new medication.

While you are discussing drug interactions with your doctor or pharmacist, be sure to tell them about any over-the-counter medications that you are using. Also include vitamin, mineral or herbal supplements that you may be taking. Some of these supplements may interact with your prescription medications.

Some side effects may include dizziness, nausea, rashes, indigestion, or drowsiness. Call your doctor immediately if you're experiencing any side effects.

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As you look at your medication regimen, there are certain things to keep in mind.

Medicines do not produce the same result for each person. Never take drugs that are prescribed for another person, even though you believe that you have the same symptoms.

You may want to develop a chart that shows all of your medications and when you take them. It may be a good idea to buy a pill box where you can place your medications in a compartment that organizes your medications daily.

If child-proof containers are hard for you to open, ask the pharmacist for pill containers that are easier to open. *In all cases, keep medications out of the reach of children.*

Make sure that you understand the directions for taking a medication. Do you take it in the morning with food? Are there foods you should avoid eating while you are taking a medication? Do you take it in the evening? If you do not understand the instructions, ask the doctor or pharmacist to repeat them. You may want to jot down the instructions in a small notebook.

Throw away medications that are past their expiration date. Many can lose their effectiveness over time and may actually be harmful if taken after they have expired.

It is a good idea to occasionally review your list of prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs and supplements with your doctor or pharmacist.

The University of Rhode Island (URI) Pharmacy Outreach Program helps Rhode Islanders learn about their medications through education, counseling and health screenings. Their library contains valuable information about a wide range of subjects from hypertension and diabetes to contemporary topics such as alternative treatments and herbal remedies. Staff and students from the Pharmacy Outreach Program offer presentations on many pharmacy issues including the popular Brown Bag Program, where seniors bring in their medications for an analysis of possible drug interactions.

In addition to the Brown Bag Program, the URI Pharmacy Outreach Program covers topics such as the Medicare Part D program and drug imports from Canada. The Pharmacy Outreach Program typically makes more than 300 visits each year to area senior centers for presentations and one-to-one counseling.

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To schedule a counseling session or presentation or to obtain more information, call 1-800-215-9001. You can also log on to www.uri.edu/pharmacy/outreach.

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The Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs (DEA) was established as a cabinet-level position in 1977 under Rhode Island General Law 42-66-1. DEA is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive system of programs and services for Rhode Islanders ages 60 and older and for adults with disabilities. DEA is also the state's single planning and service Area Agency on Aging under the provisions of the Older Americans Act of 1965.