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Age Healthfully: Overcome Medication Hurdles

Problems from failing eyesight to swallowing difficulties can make it more challenging for older adults to follow a medication regimen.

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Older adults take more medicines than any other age group. They may also face issues in doing so, from failing eyesight to trouble swallowing. These issues cause some people to stop taking their medicines. But there are many ways to work around it.

First, it's important to understand why you're taking the medicine, plus how and when to take it. Bring a friend or relative to the doctor with you if you think you will need help later with remembering the steps. Also ask the office staff or pharmacist for printed information about your medicine to take home with you.

If you have physical limitations that may get in the way of taking medicine, you'll need to think about that next. These tips may help you:

Low vision or blindness

- Ask your pharmacist to print your medicine label in larger type.
- Review pill shapes and sizes with your doctor.
- Use a pill organizer to help you put the right pills together for each day and time you need to take

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them.

- Use bottles of different colors or sizes, or attach a rubber band or string around one bottle to help you tell pills apart.
- Have someone pre-measure, pre-cut, or pre-fill your medicines.
- Ask your pharmacist to record the medicine directions so you can listen to it or provide directions in Braille.

Hearing loss

- Get complete directions on your medicines in writing.
- Ask your doctor to speak louder and/or into your better ear.
- Bring an interpreter with you to the doctor.

Impaired fine motor skills

- Request large, easy-open bottles for your medicines.
- Ask to have pills split for you if needed.
- Some pharmacists will prepare medicine in special dose packages for daily or weekly meds.
- Transfer the medicine to an easy-open bottle or container. Then put a label on it so you remember what medicine is in it.

Swallowing problems

- Ask for a pill you can crush or a capsule you can open and mix with food.
- [See](#) if a smaller pill is available of the same medicine.
- Ask if the medicine comes in a liquid, skin patch, or suppository.

Mobility issues

- Get your medicine through a mail-order pharmacy.
- Find a pharmacy that offers home delivery.
- Ask family and friends to pick up your order.
- Refill early so you don't get stuck without your medicine.

Now, get organized

Make your prescription regimen as easy to follow as possible. If you're older, chances are you are taking several medicines. This can make it harder to remember which medicine to take at what time. Memory aids can help.

- **Buy a pill box** at the drug store. Some have compartments labeled for different times of the day.
- **Make it easy to find.** Keep your medicines in one place unless refrigeration is required. Keep those taken by mouth apart from creams and ointments. Place medicines you have to take during the night by your bed.
- **Write down directions** for each medicine on a separate piece of paper. Tape a sample of each pill on the paper.
- **Create a routine.** Plan to take your medicines at the same time each day along with another daily task - say, at breakfast or when [brushing your teeth](#) .
- **Set alerts.** Use a watch, phone, or computer to let you know when it's time for a medicine.

- **Use a checklist** to keep track of your medicines. Post it on the refrigerator or medicine cabinet.
- **Go high-tech.** Buy pill caps with beeping reminder timers or caps that track how many times you've opened the bottle for a dose.
- **Find a service or person to give you reminder calls** to take your medicines.

Always ask about options

Sometimes the benefits of medication are not clear. But you should never stop taking a medicine on your own without telling your doctor. There are often ways to simplify or change how you take your medicines. Talk to your doctor or druggist about possible solutions. You may be able to swap that pill you take four times a day for one that only requires two daily doses. The key to staying healthy is to find a strategy that will help you take your medicines the right way.

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