



Medicines and Falls

There are many drugs that may make older people more likely to have a fall. They can change the way the body's natural balance systems work. As people get older this can be more of a problem.

If you take more than four kinds of medication, ask your GP or pharmacist to check them regularly. Do not mix alcohol with medications as this can cause dizziness and reduced balance.

Make sure you check the label each time you have a repeat prescription, do not depend on the colour of the tablet as the colour may change if it has been supplied by another company. Not doing this means that there is a risk of overdosing. The two main side effects which can be a problem are sleepiness (sedation) and faintness/dizziness.

Sleepiness (sedation)

This medication side-effect is one of the most common causes of falls. Some of the drug groups which may cause this are:

- Hypnotics (sleeping tablets)
- Anxiolytics (sedatives)
- Some of the older drugs for depression
- Some of the older drugs for hay-fever and allergy
- Drugs that are used to treat some mental health problems

Medical experts discourage the use of sleeping tablets or sedatives for too long.

However, if you have been taking these types of drugs for some time and want to stop them, it can be quite difficult.

If you feel that you would like to stop taking them, talk to your GP. Your GP may be able to reduce the dose you are prescribed over a number of weeks (or sometimes months).

This will help you to reduce the dosage bit by bit and in time you should be able to stop.

Doing it this way should help prevent unpleasant side-effects.



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Dizziness/faintness

Dizziness or faintness can be caused by low blood pressure. It is the other major cause of falls in older people. This is usually noticed as a feeling of faintness or dizziness as you stand up when you have been sitting or lying down. Some groups of medicines which may have this effect are those used to treat:

- High blood pressure
- Heart problems
- Urinary problems
- Glaucoma
- Depression
- Mental health problems
- Parkinson's Disease
- Vertigo - Prochlorperazine (Stemetil®) – this drug is sometimes given to treat symptoms of vertigo, but can unfortunately cause dizziness and falls, especially in older people.

It is important to remember that you should not stop any of these drugs suddenly. If you feel that one of your medicines may be making you feel drowsy, faint or dizzy, check whether it can cause these effects with your local Pharmacist. If the drug(s) could be a problem, make an appointment to see your GP. You and your GP will be able to decide what is the best thing to do.