

# Well



# & Wiser

What we know about  
**medications** as we age

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**Did you know?**

Over-the-counter medications and supplements can interact with prescriptions.

# What we've learned about aging and medication.

As we age, the body works differently. Sleep patterns shift. We carry less water. Metabolism slows. The liver and kidneys work more slowly.

**Substances of all kinds can effect us differently as we age.**

It's important to be mindful if you take:

- Prescriptions
- Over-the-counter drugs
- Vitamins
- Supplements
- Herbal remedies
- Use alcohol, cannabis, or other substances

## Why that could matter to you

-  **Loss of balance and increased risk of falls**
-  **Increased risk of side effects**
-  **Interruptions in sleep and daily readiness**
-  **New or worsening anxiety or depression**



## Did you know?

The dosage you have taken before may not be right for you now.

## Mixing medications

Taking multiple medications, even over-the-counter ones, increases the risk of side effects or medical emergencies. Using cannabis or alcohol can increase these risks. **It's safest to avoid drinking alcohol (or using cannabis) if you take:**

- Pain medications or muscle relaxants
- Sleep aids
- Medication for anxiety or depression
- Cold or allergy medications

## What to watch for

Talk to your healthcare provider before taking over-the-counter medications or supplements if you're being treated for:

- Pain
- Anxiety or depression
- Diabetes
- Heart health or high blood pressure

## What you can do

Keep a list of all the medications, vitamins, and supplements you take, including how much and how often. Bring that list to every doctor or pharmacist visit.



### Ask your doctor or pharmacist

- What is this for?
- How should I take it?
- Could any of these medications interact with each other, alcohol or cannabis?
- Can I drive after taking this?
- What are the side effects?
- Are there alternatives to medications for my symptoms?

## Quick facts

→ **Medications are more than just prescriptions.**

Our bodies process all substances differently as we age.

→ **Medication effects can change or intensify as we age**

due to reduced body water, lower muscle mass, and higher fat tissue.

→ **Taking multiple medications, even over-the-counter, increases risks** of side effects or medical emergencies.

→ **Alcohol or cannabis use can increase the risk of side effects** like memory issues, drowsiness, or lack of coordination.

### Help for you or someone you care about

Concerned about your or a loved one's medication or substance use? Call VT Helplink for free, confidential support at **802-565-4565** or visit [VTHelplink.com](https://www.vthelplink.com), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**If someone is not waking up or having trouble breathing, call 911.**



To find resources and support near you, call:



**Support and Services at Home (SASH)**  
**802-863-2224**



**Vermont Area Agencies on Aging Senior HelpLine**  
**1-800-642-5119**



**Vermont Department of Health**  
[HealthVermont.gov/WellAndWiser](https://www.healthvermont.gov/WellAndWiser)

