

News For Older Adults & Caregivers: What You Need To Know About Potentially Inappropriate Medications

(NAPSA)—As people age, their bodies change—and so does their health care. People 65-years-old and older are prescribed medications more frequently than any other group and they often require multiple medications to manage several health conditions at the same time. Changes in how your body functions, however, can also increase the chances you'll experience side effects due to medication use.

How can we identify and avoid certain medications that may be associated with more risks than benefits? Fortunately, a set of updated resources from the American Geriatrics Society (AGS) known as the AGS Beers Criteria are here to help.

“The AGS Beers Criteria are lists of potentially inappropriate medications for older adults who are not receiving hospice or palliative care, terms describing care for people who are chronically, seriously or terminally ill,” explains Dr. Todd P. Semla, a board certified pharmacist and co-chair of the expert panel responsible for the 2015 AGS Beers Criteria update.

To develop these lists, a panel of health care and pharmacy experts brought together by the AGS and led by Dr. Semla and Dr. Donna Fick, a board certified gerontological clinical nurse specialist, reviewed more than 6,700 medical studies among more than 20,000 research articles published since the last AGS Beers Criteria update in 2012. Experts also released a list of potential alternative therapies for many medications included on the AGS Beers Criteria, recognizing that older adults and health care providers benefit from expert guidance most when they also can identify alternative options that may be safer and even more effective than potentially inappropriate medications.

Among the more than 40 medications included on the 2015 AGS Beers Criteria, some—such as benzodiazepines (diazepam or Valium, for example), medications sometimes prescribed for anxiety or insomnia—are considered inappropriate for most older adults or for those with specific health concerns that can affect how different treatments work. Others are medications that should be used only with considerable caution because evidence suggests they could be harmful in certain situations. Proton-pump inhibitors (omeprazole or Prilosec, for example) sometimes given to people for such conditions as acid reflux or stomach ulcers may be worth avoiding because they can contribute to bone loss, fractures and serious gastrointestinal bacterial infections.

Additional lists added to the AGS Beers Criteria in 2015 address medications that should be avoided or given in different doses to people with poor kidney function, as well as specific medications that should not be used together. Treatments for several



Older adults and their health care providers should work together to discuss medications that are safe and effective for each individual person.

conditions common in older adults may be inappropriate when prescribed at the same time, for example, because they can increase risks for other health problems—from falls and fractures to trouble with bladder control or medication toxicity (the term for a dangerous build-up of medication in the body).

“It’s very important to remember that potentially inappropriate medications are just that—potentially inappropriate,” notes Dr. Fick. “They should be considered carefully, but that doesn’t mean they’re ‘bad’ in all cases or for all people. In fact, your health care providers are often in the best position to assess your medications, goals, preferences and health conditions to individualize what treatment options will work for you, so it’s important to begin any decision-making process with them first,” she added.

Three Key Points to Remember:

- Never stop taking a medication without first talking to your health care provider. Even if a medication you’re taking is on the AGS Beers Criteria, don’t stop taking it without discussing it with your health care provider first.
- Ask about side effects. If you’re experiencing any symptoms, ask your health care provider if your symptoms could be related to a medication you may be taking. Also ask if the symptoms could be a sign of another problem. Keep in mind that any symptom you may be experiencing may or may not be a side effect of one or more of your medications.

- Use trusted sources for information. Look up the reasons a medication might be prescribed (also known as the treatment’s “indication”) and any potential side effects only on trusted, reliable sources, such as MedLinePlus.

The AGS’s Health in Aging Foundation has created a series of materials to help older adults and their caregivers understand the AGS Beers Criteria. Health care providers can also use such tools to promote safe prescribing for older adults. Resources including a fact sheet on medications and older adults, a list of select medications to avoid, a medication diary and a breakdown of certain alternatives to potentially inappropriate medications are all available, free, at HealthinAging.org.