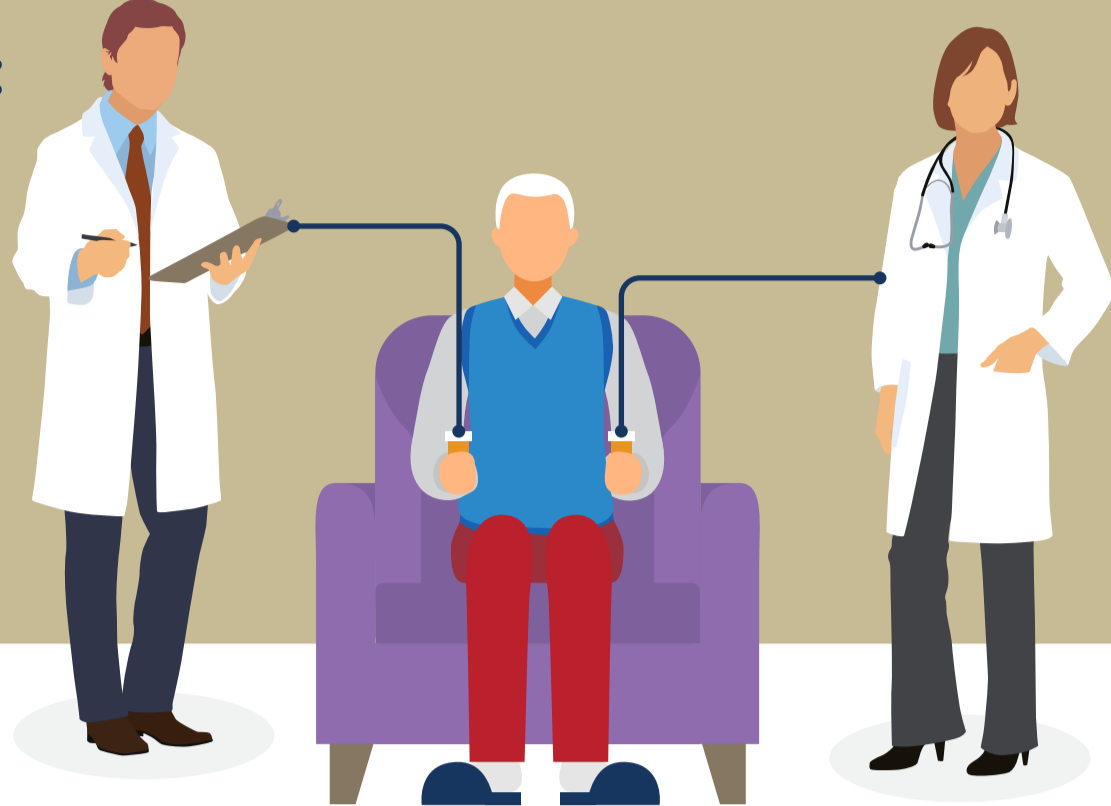


Preventing Dangerous Effects of **POLYPHARMACY** in Elderly Patients

Polypharmacy, or taking multiple prescription medications to manage just one health issue, is becoming an epidemic in elderly patients. Polypharmacy, and the risks associated with taking multiple medications, can seriously affect elderly patients' health. By knowing the risks and staying alert, nurses can ensure their elderly patients aren't being overly medicated.

A COMMON PROBLEM:

Polypharmacy can be hard to spot, as it typically happens when elderly patients are prescribed medications by different, independent healthcare providers.



44% of men and **57% of women** 65+ take 5+ medications weekly²



12% take 10+ medications weekly



43% of elderly ambulatory patients with cancer take 10+ medications

78.8% of aged care facility residents are willing to discontinue 1 or more medications



ADVERSE DRUG REACTIONS (ADR):

Polypharmacy can seriously impact elderly patients' health, often leading to ADRs.



6% of ADRs have fatal or serious consequences²



5% to 7% of hospitalizations result from ADRs

Approximately **140,000 fatalities** are caused by ADRs annually



When paired with other drugs, seemingly harmless medications like Pepto-Bismol and aspirin can contribute significantly to ADR



SHIFT IN HEALTH SPENDING:

Polypharmacy doesn't just affect elderly patients' health—it also impacts their finances.



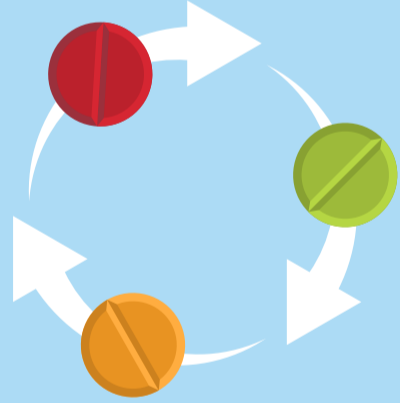
Continuous outpatient visits and hospitalization increase medical costs by **30%**

Those who take 5+ medications spend **6.2% more** on prescriptions



DRUG-DRUG INTERACTIONS:

Elderly patients are predisposed to the risks associated with polypharmacy³







15%–40% of elderly patients experience drug-drug interactions

Elderly patients taking 5+ daily medications have **80% chance of drug-drug interaction**

Elderly patients taking 20+ medications have **100% probability of drug-drug interaction**

WHAT CAUSES POLYPHARMACY?

-  Clinicians and patients have different opinions on treatment
-  Elderly patients may be dealing with memory loss or diseases like Alzheimer's
-  Patients use OTC drugs to treat side effects of prescription medications
-  Patients visit multiple doctors and clinicians and receive many prescriptions

TIPS FOR REDUCING HARMFUL EFFECTS⁴

- ✓ Instruct patients to bring all OTC, herbal, and supplemental medications to appointments
- ✓ Screen for unnecessary drugs at each medical visit
- ✓ Immediately discontinue any drugs without a clear purpose
- ✓ Prescribe drugs with better or less side effects
- ✓ Simplify drug regimens and avoid frequent changes in drug schedules
- ✓ Thoroughly explain prescribed regimens to ensure patient understands
- ✓ Provide clear written instructions to accompany medications

Taking multiple medications leads to greater health care costs, increased risk of ADRs, and medication non-adherence in elderly patients. However, nurses can serve as extremely important checkpoints. By taking the proper steps and precautions, nurses can catch early signs to prevent elderly patients from becoming dependent on multiple medications.



CEUfast
NURSING CE

To learn more about CEUfast Nursing CE's polypharmacy course, visit ceufast.com/course/is-polypharmacy-the-new-normal-for-the-elderly-patient

¹ http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/732131_1

² <https://ceufast.com/course/is-polypharmacy-the-new-normal-for-the-elderly-patient>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3864987/>

⁴ <https://ceufast.com/course/is-polypharmacy-the-new-normal-for-the-elderly-patient>

Note: Figures are based on U.S. statistics and averages from multiple sources. Complete references are listed on <https://ceufast.com/course/is-polypharmacy-the-new-normal-for-the-elderly-patient>