

# Health Bulletin



## WellPoint Provides Tips For Playing It Safe With Medicine

(NAPSA)—As we age, most of us come to depend on prescription drugs to help us live healthier, longer lives. But the very medications that we count on for better health could also land us in the hospital. Drug mishaps are especially common among older Americans, who generally take more medications to treat chronic conditions. Fortunately, with a little bit of caution, many incidents can be prevented.

Matthew Gibbs, Pharm. D., chief pharmacy executive for pharmacy services at WellPoint, one of the nation's largest insurers, which serves hundreds of thousands of Medicare members through its affiliated Medicare Advantage, Prescription Drug and Medicare Supplement Plans, offers the following tips for playing it safe with prescription drugs.

**Know Your Drugs.** Know everything you can about each drug you take, including its name, color, shape, dosage, side effects, what it treats, when and how to take it, and how to store it. Maintain a checklist that you can carry with you on a trip or in an emergency. If you don't understand something, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Sometimes, it is helpful to take a friend to the doctor so you don't miss anything. If you have a Medicare Advantage plan, such as those offered through WellPoint's affiliates, your insurer may have a pharmacist review your drugs with you at no extra cost.



**Don't hesitate to ask your doctor or pharmacist any question you may have about the medications you take.**

**Beware of Interactions.** Interactions are most likely to occur after your drugs have changed, following a doctor appointment or hospital visit. When you're prescribed a new drug, make sure the doctor knows about your existing medications, including over-the-counter supplements, which also can cause interactions. Some drugs may affect your balance, so keep your home clear of potential fall hazards. Be aware that certain foods may cause adverse reactions. If you think you're having a bad interaction, call the doctor immediately.

**Follow Instructions.** Taking different medicines isn't easy. Establish a routine by taking your medication at the same time every day. An inexpensive pillbox may help you stay organized. Never increase, decrease or stop a dos-

age without talking to your doctor. If swallowing is difficult, ask your doctor or pharmacist for a liquid alternative or to crush your tablets (if allowable, but don't do it yourself).

**Get Help If You Need It.** Please don't risk your health because of concerns about cost. Medicare Prescription Drug Plans cover the cost of most drugs, including low-cost generic options, although premiums may apply. Additionally, there are a number of programs to help with prescription drug costs. Social Security, for example, may offer "extra help," depending on your income. Contact your local office for details. And WellPoint helps sponsor the National Council on Aging's BenefitsCheckUp, which connects people with help for medicine, rent, utilities and meals. For details, visit [www.benefitscheckup.org/wellpoint](http://www.benefitscheckup.org/wellpoint).

Finally, never take someone else's medicine for any reason.

"Your doctor has prescribed your medicine for a reason," Gibbs said. "By working closely with your physician and your pharmacist, taking the correct dosage at the right time, and educating yourself about possible side effects, you should be able to get that benefit while heading off any problems."

WellPoint affiliates offer Medicare Prescription Drug Plans in all 50 states. In many states, plans are sold under the UniCare brand.