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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Avoiding Drug Interaction in Older Family Members¹

Patricia Bartlett and Linda Bobroff²

Does your aging father have trouble with stomach upsets or has his appetite markedly decreased? Has he developed a problem with incontinence, or with headaches? According to Paul Doering, a professor of pharmacy at the University of Florida, older people often take multiple medications and may be unaware of possible drug interactions.

"Any time you take more than six medications," Doering said, "you can expect drug interactions, and the rate of interaction goes up exponentially the more drugs you take."

It's not just prescribed medications that are to blame. Over-the-counter medications can interact with each other and with prescribed drugs.

Drugs can also contribute to dementia. A study of 300 individuals under 60 who had been referred to a dementia clinic found that cognitive ability in 35 individuals improved after some of their drugs—drugs not known to cause confusion—were stopped.

The best way to avoid drug interaction problems for an aging family member, or even for yourself, is to purchase all your drugs from a single source. Your pharmacist has years of specialized training on drugs and their effects and can be a valuable resource for possible interactions.

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2. Patricia Bartlett, staff writer, and Linda Bobroff, professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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Also, make certain your doctor and your pharmacist know what supplements and over-the-counter medications are being taken. Read the warning labels on prescription and other medications to learn of possible drug interactions, and don't share medications prescribed for anyone else. The consequences can be deadly!

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