

De-Prescribing – Less is More



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Understanding Polypharmacy?¹

Polypharmacy is defined as the use of five or more medications.¹ Polypharmacy can be a problem because it increases the chance of interactions with other medications or diseases.² The elderly population can be at risk for polypharmacy due to the number of medical conditions seen with old age.³ Treating a side effect of one medication with another can further the overuse of medications.

Risk Factors Leading to Polypharmacy^{2,4}

- Frailty
- Obesity
- More than 8 health conditions
- Declining health
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart failure
- Osteoporosis
- Pain
- Insomnia

One reason providers do not stop medications is because they do not know why patients are taking a medication. This is often the case if another provider prescribed the medication. This causes concern about stopping what may be seen as a needed medication. Patients can help this process by knowing why they are on each medication. Even over the counter products can cause drug interactions or side effects. Telling a healthcare provider about all medications taken can help prevent problems.

Risks of Polypharmacy^{2,3}

- Unnecessary medications
- Drug-Drug interactions
- Drug-Disease interactions
- More side effects
- Storing medications incorrectly
- Taking medications incorrectly

Many medications provide a clear benefit to health. It is very important not to stop taking medications without first talking to a provider. With all medications, it is important to determine the risks and benefits on quality of life. Some medications help improve the ability to function or decrease the chance of serious health outcomes like a heart attack or stroke. Other medications may not affect health and quality of life as directly. Reviewing a medication list with a healthcare provider is a great way to address concerns about polypharmacy.

If concerned about polypharmacy, talk to a VA healthcare provider about a consult. A referral to a pharmacist for an appointment can address any concerns. Providers reviewing a medication list can identify what is needed and what can be removed.

Resources:

1. Masnoon N, Shakib S, Kalisch-Ellett L, Caughey GE. What is polypharmacy? A systematic review of definitions. *BMC Geriatr*. 2017 Oct 10;17(1):230.
2. Onder G, Marengoni A. Polypharmacy. *JAMA*. 2017 Nov 7;318(17):1728.
3. Wastesson JW, Morin L, Tan ECK, Johnell K. An update on the clinical consequences of polypharmacy in older adults: a narrative review. *Expert Opin Drug Saf*. 2018 Dec;17(12):1185-1196.
4. Rieckert A et al. Polypharmacy in older patients with chronic diseases: a cross-sectional analysis of factors associated with excessive polypharmacy. *BMC Fam Pract*. 2018 Jul 18;19(1):113.

Ways to address concerns²

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Tips for Managing Polypharmacy



Keep an accurate, updated list of your prescribed medications.

Ask each clinician you visit to review your list.

Inform your doctor of any supplements, herbal products, and over-the-counter medications you are taking.



Understand why you are taking each of your medications.

Be aware of what side effects to look out for.

Discuss ways to simplify your medication regimen with your doctor.

Ask if you can discontinue any medications.



Take all medications as prescribed.

Do not suddenly stop taking any prescribed medication.

N. Reback

Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs)

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Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs)

PPIs are a class of medications used to treat many conditions caused by increased stomach acid. While this class does have its place for use, PPIs are among the most over-prescribed medications worldwide. The rate of PPI usage can lead to incorrect use.¹

PPIs:

- Omeprazole (Prilosec)
- Pantoprazole (Protonix)
- Esomeprazole (Nexium)
- Rabeprazole (Aciphex)
- Dexlansoprazole (Dexilant)
- Lansoprazole (Prevacid)

Risks of PPI use

While PPIs do help to decrease stomach acid, several adverse events have been linked to long-term use.²



Long-Term Effects of PPI use³

- Increased risk of infections such as pneumonia and C. difficile diarrhea
- Kidney damage and reduced kidney function
- Lower levels of iron, calcium, and B vitamins
- Increased risk of broken bones

Treating Stomach Acid Without PPIs

A common use for PPIs is Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Periodic GERD or heartburn can be managed with as needed medications. Taking medications such as Tums or famotidine when needed for symptoms can effectively control

stomach acid. As needed medications reduce side effects seen with long-term PPI use.² These conditions can be improved with lifestyle changes.

Lifestyle Changes to Improve GERD and Heartburn³

- Losing weight
- Decreasing alcohol use
- Avoiding nicotine products
- Avoid spicy food, chocolate, caffeine, or other triggering foods
- Do not go to bed within 2-3 hours of eating
- Avoid fatty meals
- Decrease food portions
- Elevate your head when sleeping



Resources:

1. Nehra AK et al. Proton Pump Inhibitors: Review of Emerging Concerns. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2018 Feb;93(2):240-246.
2. Vaezi MF, Yang YX, Howden CW. Complications of Proton Pump Inhibitor Therapy. *Gastroenterology.* 2017 Jul;153(1):35-48.
3. VHA PBM Academic Detailing Service. Do You Take Medicine for Stomach Acid? Should You Stop Taking Your Proton Pump Inhibitor (PPI)? US Department of Veterans Affairs. 2019 Jan. PDF.
4. Swift D. Acid Suppressants Tied to Higher Risk for Multidrug-Resistant GI Bugs. *Medical News and Free CME Online.* <https://www.medpagetoday.com/gastroenterology/gerd/85066>. Published February 25, 2020. Accessed February 27, 2020.

What Your PACT Pharmacist Can Do for You

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What is PACT?

Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) is a team made of medicine, nursing, pharmacy, social work, and other services provided by the VA. The goal is for these healthcare professionals to work with Veterans in an outpatient setting to achieve life-long health and wellness. The focus of this service is to provide access to healthcare, coordinate care, and create a team-based approach for all Veterans. One aspect offered by this service is access to a pharmacist provider.

PACT Pharmacy Providers

Referral to a PACT pharmacist allows for them to manage disease states diagnosed by the primary care provider. The PACT pharmacist prescribes and adjusts medications in order to help manage chronic disease states. PACT pharmacists also order labs to monitor chronic health conditions. The PACT pharmacist is a great resource to review any medication concerns. PACT pharmacists provide in-depth education about medications to Veterans. They also serve as a resource to review labs, allergies, and medication lists. It is important to bring an up to date medication list to each appointment, complete with over the counter and herbal products. Bringing blood sugar or blood pressure logs is important if the provider is managing diabetes or high blood pressure. Talk to a primary care provider for a referral to a PACT pharmacist for help with chronic health conditions.

Conditions managed by PACT Pharmacy Providers:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- COPD
- Heart failure
- High cholesterol
- Osteoporosis



Mental Health Pharmacist Provider

Similar to PACT pharmacist providers, mental health pharmacist providers are part of the healthcare team and help manage mental health conditions. Clinical pharmacists are present in inpatient mental health, outpatient mental health, and the pain/polytrauma clinic. Pharmacists help ensure safe use of mental health medications. The pharmacist has valuable input regarding the choice of medication to help treat mental health and substance use conditions. The pharmacist is knowledgeable about what side effects are more common with different types of medications. This is useful given the number of options available for mental health medications. Pharmacist providers also help Veterans with pain management, using pain medications other than opioid painkillers to help veterans manage pain safely. Pharmacy providers make referrals to The Whole Health Clinic, which offers added options for pain such as Battlefield Acupuncture.

Conditions managed by Mental Health Pharmacy Providers:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Smoking cessation
- Alcohol use disorder
- Opioid use disorder

For more information visit:

<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/primarycare/PACT.asp>

Resources:

1. US Department of Veterans Affairs. Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) Pharmacist Providers. Brochure. 2019.
2. VA.gov: Veterans Affairs. Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT). <https://www.patientcare.va.gov/primarycare/PACT.asp>. Published January 20, 2016. Accessed January 31, 2020.
3. US Department of Veterans Affairs. Mental Health Pharmacist Providers. Brochure. 2019.