



MEDICINES - STOPPING A MEDICINE

Stopping a medicine can seem daunting, especially if you've been taking the medicine for a long time. But for many older people, stopping a particular medicine may actually benefit their health. Medicine problems such as side effects and interactions are common when you are an older person. The more medicines you take, the more likely you are to experience these problems. Many older people successfully stop medicines without feeling worse. In fact, you may feel better and improve your quality of life — especially if your symptoms were being caused by your medicines.

A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL MAY RECOMMEND YOU STOP TAKING A MEDICINE BECAUSE:

- the medicine is causing, or may cause, harmful side effects and medicine interactions
- the medicine isn't working or won't help you achieve your treatment goals
- the medicine is no longer needed for your current medical conditions
- you are having difficulty taking the medicine
- other treatment options are more suitable for you.

WHEN SHOULD I STOP TAKING A MEDICINE?

Your doctor or another health professional will recommend the best way to stop your medicines when this is necessary. Their advice is very important, as your medicines may need to be stopped carefully.

You may be able to stop a medicine immediately — and this is usually recommended for any medicine that is causing you harm.

But some medicines need to be stopped gradually. This is because they can cause serious symptoms or other problems if you suddenly stop taking them. Medicines that may do this include:

- some antidepressants
- anxiety medicines
- corticosteroid medicines
- some medicines for the heart, blood, and blood vessels
- levodopa (used for Parkinson's disease)
- pain relief medicines that contain opioids
- sedatives and medicines for sleep problems.

Stopping medicines like those listed above usually involves slowly reducing your dose over time, or slowly reducing how often you take the medicine. Exactly how you do this can depend on:

- the medicine you need to stop
- the dose you are taking
- how long you were taking the medicine for
- your current health
- previous experiences with stopping the medicine.

What you are most comfortable with is also important, so let your health professional know if you have any



preferences so you can agree on a plan.

STOPPING ONE MEDICINE AT A TIME

You may need to stop taking several of your medicines. This doesn't mean they will all need to be stopped at the same time.

A health professional may advise you to stop one or two medicines at a time so it is more manageable and safer for you. Which medicine to stop first will depend on which medicine is clearly not benefiting you, is causing side effects, or is most likely to cause you harm.

REVIEWING YOUR PROGRESS

When you are stopping a medicine let your health professional know if you are experiencing any new symptoms or changes in how you feel.

A medicine may need to be restarted if you realise you were feeling better while taking it, or because you'd like to try stopping it another time.

Symptoms you develop when stopping a medicine or reducing the dose may also mean you will need to reduce the medicine more slowly. Sometimes these symptoms get better over time, without you having to restart the medicine or previous dose.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

- Talk to your health professional about what you want to achieve with your health and wellbeing.
- Discuss any problems or concerns you have about your medicines with a health professional. Ask if any new symptoms you are experiencing could be due to any medicines you are taking.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about having your medicines reviewed.
- Use a medicines list to help keep track of your medicines: record any changes that are made to your medicines, and show the list to all the people involved in your health care.
- Find out what other services and resources can help you manage your health and medicines.

You may find it helpful to have a carer or family/whānau member with you when talking to anyone involved in your health care — especially if English is not your first language.

It's OK to ask questions

If you have questions about your symptoms or the medicines managing your symptoms, speak with your health professional.

*Adapted from NPS MedicineWise (2013), [When and how to stop taking a medicine](#).
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