

Polypharmacy in Older Adults



Defining Polypharmacy

- The ingestion of **four or more medications (including over the counter medications)**, specifically in an outpatient setting
- For institutionalized and hospitalized patients this definition can include up to **10 medications**

Statistics on Polypharmacy

- According to a report cited by the Department of Health and Human Services (1998), as many as **30%** of older adults are taking **8 or more medications**
- **80%** of older adults ingest an average of **3 prescription medications** on a daily basis
- **45%** of older adults are taking at least one non-prescription medication on a daily basis
- **86%** of medications taken by older adults are for a long-term health condition

Subgroups of Polypharmacy:

- **Appropriate polypharmacy**- appropriate multi-drug treatment
- **Inappropriate polypharmacy**- ingesting more drugs than necessary
- **Pseudopolypharmacy**- medication recording errors in facilities that falsely suggest polypharmacy is occurring

Polypharmacy has the potential to lead to drug misuse and abuse as well as many of the same side effects associated with Benzodiazepine misuse.



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