

SESSION CONTENT

5.1 Welcome and outline (2 min)

Welcome participants, introduce the expert, and briefly outline today's session.

5.2 Review homework and exercises (15 min)



- Review participants' personal goals and achievements regarding pedestrian safety during the last week.
- Review shoe audit homework. **Say/Paraphrase:** *Did anyone try a shoe audit or shop for shoes? How did that go?*
- Review the exercises and practice difficult ones. Link these exercises to how they prevent falls and improve function.
 - Ask how participants are fitting the exercises into their daily lives.
 - Ask how weights are going and increase if needed.
 - Ask if someone would like to demonstrate an advanced exercise they did.
 - Recognize individual achievements. Some people don't like to be told what to do. For example, one participant tells us she is doing the exercises voluntarily because "You didn't tell me I have to do it for the rest of my life." It is important that people figure that out for themselves. Positively reinforce her efforts. **Say/Paraphrase:** *It's fantastic that you're achieving this in your everyday life. Praise and support is common from the leader and often spontaneous from other group members.*
 - Ask for ideas about why it is important to keep the exercises challenging.

5.3 Medication management (35 min)



Our guest speaker will complete this section — Pharmacist:

Invite a pharmacist as the guest speaker, preferably one who is familiar with medications for the elderly. There may be a local pharmacist who regularly consults with nursing home residents about their medications. Check with a local nursing home for



advice. If no pharmacist is available, then a nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, or registered nurse may serve as guest expert.

This is an important session, as research shows that a high percentage of older adults are prescribed the wrong sleeping and anti-anxiety medications, or higher doses than necessary, and that these practices increase the number of falls.

The goals of this segment are to:

1. Demonstrate the falling risks posed by sedatives, anxiety medications, and antidepressants. Recommend avoiding sleeping medications and reviewing the need for anti-anxiety medications. Consider behavioral alternatives to sleeping problems. Encourage medications to be reviewed for dosage levels. Even reducing the dosage can have a positive effect on falls.
2. Encourage participants to use a personal medication record and show it to their doctor, specialists, and pharmacist at regular intervals. The goal is to make sure that:
 - When a new drug is prescribed, their doctor and pharmacist are aware of all medications they are currently taking and can review possible interactions.
 - The doctor and specialists regularly review the medications so that those not needed are dropped or the dosage adjusted.
 - People clearly record how often and how they take medications.
3. Develop ways of finding out the side effects of medications.
4. Encourage participants to plan ahead before visits to the doctor and ask questions until they get an answer. We often accept what the doctor tells us without question, but we have a right to know and understand. Spend some time talking about the importance of asking questions, how to go about it, and the kinds of questions to ask.
5. Encourage them to have a regular pharmacist who will give them information about their medications.

Occasionally leaders become aware of participants who are on medications and having side effects. Here is an example from a past session: Megan said to Maizy, “You seem rather dozy today.” She replied, “Yes, I think I had two sedatives last night instead of one.” She clearly was not focused and at risk of falling. She tripped a couple of times and became a negative role model, reinforcing other members to be wary of sedatives. While Maizy did not stop taking sedatives, she had the dosage reviewed. We believe that this kind of message is preventive for many people.



The goals are to warn participants of the dangers of regular sedative use, raise their awareness of the dangers of not taking medications as prescribed and possible side effects, have strategies whereby their doctors and pharmacists can easily review their medications and dosages, and show them other methods of coping with sleep difficulties.

The format:

The format for this segment is a discussion based on the outline below.

Present this section in a manner relevant to participants' experiences and habits. Encourage them to share their personal experiences to illustrate some of the points. Presenters can facilitate by using their own personal experiences as examples and prompting or asking questions.

The outline: Medication management

a. Antidepressants, anti-anxiety and sleeping medications

- There is strong evidence that antidepressants and anti-anxiety and sleeping medications can cause falls.
- Be aware of their side effects. They can cause confusion and slow down your movements. These put you at risk of falls. By being aware of this, you can take more care in doing things. Be sure not to rush.
- With all of these medications, the risk depends on the dose. The higher the dose, the higher the risk of falls.
- Even the occasional sleeping pill may present a problem. But, once in the habit, it is extremely difficult to stop taking them. There is some evidence to suggest that the risk of falls is highest soon after starting to use such medications. There are good alternative strategies to help you avoid taking sleeping tablets on a regular basis. These will be discussed later on at the end of the session.

b. Multiple medications

- Being on more than 4 medications increases your risk for falls. The medications may interact with one another and side effects of one may add to side effects of another.
- Ask if anyone has a card or list with all of their medications and dosages.



- Pass out the **Personal Medication Card** handout and discuss:

1. What is it?

It is your personal, up-to-date record of all the medicines you are taking — when you started a medication, what it is for, how and when to take it, and any warnings.

2. Why use it?

Multiple medications mean a greater risk of falls. Your physician does not always know what specialists have prescribed. Also, he or she may not recall some of the medications you are on. The Personal Medication Card helps you, your pharmacist, and your doctors better manage your medications. This can prevent some falls.

3. How to use it?

You can ask your doctor or pharmacist to update it for you. Add all of the vitamins and other over-the-counter and alternative (herbal) medicines you sometimes take. Carry the card with you at all times and show it to your doctor at each visit. Ask your doctor to review all of your medications once a year to see what you can stop or cut down on. Show the card to your pharmacist as you ask for information about your latest prescription. The pharmacist will know about any possible interactions or side effects.

c. Find out about your medications and their side effects

- Stress with participants that it is their right to know and ask questions. It is their body that feels the side effects.
- **Brainstorm:** *What are some of the medication side effects that could cause a fall?* Answers may include:

Unsteady on your feet

Slower to move around

Confused, harder to think clearly

Blurred or double vision

Dizzy, lightheaded, woozy, or faint

Drowsy or tired

- Encourage participants to plan ahead before visits to the doctor and ask questions until they get an answer. It is not easy for most of us to ask questions, so spend some time talking about this with participants — how to go about it, its importance, and the kinds of questions to ask.



- Encourage participants to seek out a pharmacist who is willing to review personal lists of medications and their side effects. People may ask, “Why is this a good idea? What can they offer?” Many pharmacists will offer their time to help you understand side effects and how to take your medications. They can get to know you and your needs. The pharmacist can be the most important person to help you manage your medications safely.



- **Brainstorm:** *What questions should I ask my doctor or pharmacist about my medications? Answers may include:*

What is the medicine for?

What does it do? What results can I expect?

What side effects might it have?

Will this medicine interact with other medicines I am taking?

How and when do I take it?

What can I do to lessen the side effects? Are there things I need to avoid?

How long do I need to take it? When should it be stopped or reviewed?

Can you cut my dose of the medicine?

Can I get it in an easy-open bottle?

- Encourage participants not to be afraid to ask if there could be side effects to a medication, report any symptoms they are feeling, or ask if they can cut down on a medication.

d. Be cautious about medications

- Take reasonable care to reduce the risk of harm from your drugs. Know when, how, and how much medication to take — and stick to it. A pill box may be useful if you have several medications. These help you sort your medications so you can take the right pills at the right time every day.
- Don't take someone else's medication. It might have a very different effect on your body.
- Start taking a new drug or higher dosage when you know you're not



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going to be busy or, if you live alone, when someone else is likely to be around. If you notice any problems with a new drug or higher dosage, let your doctor or nurse know right away. Don't wait, since what seems like a little problem now may become a bigger problem later.

- Plan your holidays. We all tend to race around and do all those things at the last minute that we've been meaning to do for a while. When you're going on vacation, don't wait until the last minute to change your medication. Give your body time to adjust to the changes well before you leave.
- When you get out of bed, move slowly and pause before you get up, and again before you start walking. This may also be a useful strategy when you get out of a chair or a car or when you get off a bus.

At the end of this session, the leader should discuss that the homework for next week will be to use the **Personal Medication Card**. Encourage participants who will have the opportunity to see a doctor or pharmacist to review their medication list and report back to the group next week. Encourage them to put a star next to any medications they particularly want to ask their doctor or pharmacist about. Let participants know there is a **Managing Your Medications** handout for those who would like it. It is available on the display table, along with other handouts.

Alternative suggestions that can be used in this segment include:

Role play: asking a pharmacist questions about your new prescription.
Role play: asking a doctor or pharmacist to review all of your medications.



Announce a 15-minute break. Put out the beverages and snacks and make sure there is opportunity for the guest expert to work with participants who have questions or need additional assistance. Also encourage them to look at the display table items.

5.4 Bone health (35 min)

The primary purpose of this section is to teach people to maximize vitamin D intake to decrease their risk of falls and fractures. Begin with a question-answer format. The leader shows participants how to read a supplement label. Participants then work in pairs to figure out how much vitamin D they are taking and make action plans to get the

