



*Helping Seniors maintain their independence and dignity while living in their own homes for as long as possible.*

### [A Few Words From Our President.....](#)

The summer of 2015 has been extremely busy at Good Sam. The need for home care services for Seniors continues to outpace the supply of Home Health Aides and Personal Care Aides. We continue to use our best efforts to hire the best caring and compassionate Aides. So, as we anticipate training our own Aides, we continue to recruit and hire certified HHAs and PCAs.

We can always use the referrals from recipients of this newsletter. Please send HHAs or PCAs who you know are seeking employment, or want additional hours. Thank you.

### [Early-Stage Alzheimer's Caregiving](#)

In early-stage Alzheimer's disease, strangers may not even be able to notice the individual has dementia. And, in many cases, the person still has a high level of functioning, able to participate in activities of daily living.

As a caregiver, according to the Alzheimer's Association, your role may be more of a "partner" rather than "caregiver" at this stage. They recommend being a source of encouragement and support. For example, helping your loved one to remain involved with activities they enjoy.

The Alzheimer's Association notes caregivers should educate themselves about the disease as well as start preparing for future legal and financial decisions as early as possible.

### [Senior Medication Safety](#)

Research has shown that ["inappropriate prescribing" is common in older adults](#). Meaning that, when patient charts are carefully reviewed, experts often find that seniors are receiving medications that are ineffective, duplicate the effect of another medication, or otherwise lack a basis for being prescribed. [Why does this happen?](#)

Well, doctors often see patients during short visits, which can make it hard to think carefully about prescriptions. The healthcare system, after all, wasn't designed to provide ideal care to people living a long time with chronic illnesses. Doctors are also humans, not computers, so it can be a challenge for them to keep up with all the latest medical knowledge. Plus, they also just sometimes slip up, as we all do.

To reduce the chance of a senior being harmed by inappropriate medications, the answer is not to look for a super doctor. The answer is to regularly conduct a methodical medication review.

Scheduling such regular medication reviews is becoming more common in well-run primary care clinics. But if your parent's doctor's office doesn't yet offer this service, you can ask for it.

Better yet, whether a medication review is the clinic's idea or your request, you can jump-start things by doing a little preparation in advance.

It is sometimes necessary for you to [think like a geriatrician](#) in order help your doctor spot oversights, or medications that are no longer truly necessary.

### [5 Steps to Prepare for a Medication Review](#)

Before going in for your medication review, here are 5 things you can do to lay the foundation for checking a medication list for safety and appropriateness:

**1. List all medications your parent is taking, along with the intended purpose of each medication.**

If you aren't sure of why a medication is prescribed, make a note to ask the doctor. Pharmacists can usually help as well. You may also find that some medications are serving more than one purpose or diagnosis. For instance, for someone diagnosed with both hypertension and atrial fibrillation – a common combination – the cardiovascular medication diltiazem can be used to lower blood pressure, as well to keep the heart from racing.

Clarifying the purpose of a medication will make it easier for your parent and the doctor to then figure out if the medication is still necessary.



### [They say breakfast is your most important meal, but do you know why?](#)

After a good night's rest, your blood sugar, or glucose levels, are very low since you've been asleep without a meal for 6-10 hours. Your body is basically running on empty in the morning. Eating a big meal at breakfast time will 'break the fast' and replenish those glucose levels. Glucose is your body's source of energy. Your brain feeds on glucose, but does not store glucose. You'll be sharper and have better concentration when you've had a big breakfast. Glucose also feeds your muscles, so you'll feel less tired and have more energy overall, with a big breakfast. This is why it's important to eat a nutritious and healthy breakfast. With a hearty breakfast, you will not be as hungry during lunch time, and you can taper down your meals throughout the day so when the evening rolls around, you're barely eating anything - and ready for bed. It all works out nicely!

### [Banana Split Oatmeal](#)

**Ingredients** (Yield: 1 serving):

- 1/3 cup oatmeal, quick-cooking (dry)
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cups water (very hot)
- 1/2 banana (sliced)
- 1/2 cup frozen yogurt, non-fat

**Preparation:**

- In a microwave safe cereal bowl, mix together the oatmeal and salt. Stir in water.
- Microwave on high power for 1 minute. Stir.
- Microwave on high for another minute. Stir again.
- Microwave an additional 30-60 seconds on high power until the cereal reaches the desired thickness. Stir again.
- Top with banana slices and frozen yogurt.

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**2. If the purpose of a medication is to control a sign or symptom, take note of when the symptom was last checked on, and how it's been doing.**

This is especially important for medications prescribed for bothersome symptoms, such as pain, incontinence, or depressed mood. If the symptom isn't better, that is often a sign that the treatment plan needs to be reassessed, either by stopping the medication and trying something else, or by changing the dose. If the symptom is better, this might be a sign that it's time to try tapering the medication. Or it might mean the current treatment is just right and should be continued. Which it is will depend on what condition is being treated. High blood pressure, for instance, usually requires indefinite treatment. But for other conditions it might be quite appropriate to try reducing the medication to see if it's still absolutely necessary. What you don't want is for a medication to remain at the same dose simply because things are on "auto-pilot." Keeping a medication at the same dose should be an actively considered choice made by the patient and doctor together, rather than the consequence of inertia.

**3. Check to see if any of the medications are on the Beer's list.**

The easiest way to do this is to go to a page that lists all medications that are on the Beer's list – like [this one](#) – and then use your browser's search feature to check and see if any of your parent's medications are on the page. You can also ask a pharmacist to help you spot these drugs. If you do find that your parent is taking a medication on the Beer's list, this doesn't mean the doctor has prescribed inappropriately. It does mean, however, that it's extra important to review the benefits and burdens of this medication. It's also extra important to ask about non-drug alternatives for treating whatever problem the Beer's list medication is intended to treat.

For instance, it's fairly common for seniors to be prescribed medication for overactive bladder, because urinary leaks are common among older adults. But most of these drugs are [anticholinergics](#), which means they affect the brain along with the bladder. Anticholinergics are on the Beer's list because they can cause confusion in older adults; they've also been [linked with developing dementia](#). Fortunately for seniors, it's often possible to improve bladder issues using non-drug techniques, such as bladder training, pelvic strengthening exercises, or timed toileting. This may not be right for every senior, but by spotting any Beer's list medications, you can give your family an opportunity to consider potentially safer treatment options.

Along with anticholinergic drugs, the Beer's list medications I see prescribed most often to seniors are sedatives and [antidepressants](#) for sleep or anxiety, anti-psychotics for dementia, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (such as ibuprofen or naproxen, which are also available over-the-counter) for arthritis.

**4. Check for signs of over-treatment, especially for high blood pressure and diabetes.**

Did you know that it's fairly common for seniors to be receiving higher doses of medication than is actually necessary?

This can create safety issues, especially when it comes to high blood pressure and diabetes.

Over-treatment of hypertension, for example, can cause an older adult's blood pressure to be low, especially with standing. (A drop in blood pressure with standing is sometimes called orthostatic hypotension.) This can cause dizziness, or light-headedness. It can increase the risk of falls; a [study in 2014](#) found that seniors taking high blood pressure medication had a higher chance of bone-breaking falls.

Similarly, high doses of diabetes medication can cause a senior to experience episodes of hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar. Studies have found that insulin, in particular, is [linked to hospitalizations and emergency room visits](#).

To help your parent's doctor spot over-treatment, you'll want to familiarize yourself with what the "goal" is for your parent's treatment.

For blood pressure, this means finding out what range your parent's blood pressure should be in. Based on the [most recent expert guidelines](#), the recommended blood pressure target for adults aged 60 or older is less than 150/90. (The recommended goal used to be less than 140/80, but there's now increasing concern about the risks of blood pressure treatment in seniors.)

For diabetes, you'll want to find out what is a good range for your parent's random blood sugar, as well as the ideal range for his hemoglobin A1C. You can learn about expert recommendations for diabetes control in seniors [here](#).

**5. Check for drug interactions.**

You may also be concerned about the possibility of drug interactions, especially if your parent is taking several prescription medications.

If that's the case, you can try entering your parent's medications in a free online drug interaction checker. (I have tried [this one](#) and it seems relatively easy to use.) If any concerning interactions crop up, make a note to ask the doctor. You can also print the webpage showing the interactions and bring it to the next doctor's visit.

Risky drug interactions are certainly a serious issue in senior health care. That said, I find it's much more common for seniors to be suffering from other forms of "inappropriate" drug prescribing, such as being given medications that are on the Beer's list, or being aggressively treated for high blood pressure.

**Call us today at 716.783.8124**