

Episode 169 Transcript : How Many Medications Are You Taking?

Karen Brown:

Hi, everybody, and welcome to episode 169. Today we're going to renovate your medicine cabinet, or at least your checklist. As we come out of summer mode and get into fall mode, we all have this new renewed sense of wanting to get everything organized. And one of the really important things that you need to get organized is your medication checklist. Now it's super important. We all need to be sure that we're not taking too many medications. We all need to make sure that we understand what we're taking and why we're taking it. And we need to make sure that we're having regular discussions with our healthcare team, about the medications we take.

Karen Brown:

Let's wrap our head around one important fact, everything we put into our system interacts with everything else we put into our system, whether that's medication or food or beverages, everything interacts down there, everything's getting together. And sometimes there are interactions that you won't know or be aware of, unless you are completely aware of everything that you're taking.

Karen Brown:

Our system does not know the difference between a medication that your doctor prescribes and one that you self prescribe by picking it off the shelf at the grocery store. You know that antacid, you get to control your acid reflux, burping, calm your stomach? Yeah, that. How about the herbal tea that you bought just to calm yourself before bed? Or you heard that an aspirin a day is a good thing for heart health. You didn't talk about it with your doctor. You just do it. That baby aspirin. Yeah, a lot of you do it.

Karen Brown:

These are all medications. They really are. Now I know that some of you are saying, "Wait a minute, tea is a medication?" Yes, tea is a medication. Do you hear reports on the news from time to time about caffeine and you should have X number of cups of coffee? Well, there's caffeine in tea as well. There are herbal ingredients in teas. These things are all medications and they matter that you count them and that you understand how they interact with everything else that you take.

Karen Brown:

If you are taking too many medications, you may have heard of a word polypharmacy, poly, a lot, polypharmacy. There are two definitions for polypharmacy. And I want to let you know what both of them are so that you're aware of what I'm talking about and how it might apply to you. The older definition of polypharmacy is if you are taking five or more medications on a daily basis. Now notice it doesn't say prescription medications. It just says medications.

Karen Brown:

Imagine this scenario. Your doctor has prescribed two or three prescription medications for you. You take antacid on some sort of a get basis. You maybe take that little baby aspirin, maybe not. Maybe you take a Tylenol for a headache. Maybe you have a cup of Camomile Tea to calm yourself before you go to sleep. Honey, that is more than five medications. You are the definition of polypharmacy.

Karen Brown:

Now a newer definition of polypharmacy is this. Taking more medications than are required. This definition takes into account that a given person may have multiple comorbidities and each may require a medication that your doctor prescribes. The total of those medications could well be more than five, but they are required to manage your diseases or your symptoms or whatever medical issues you have.

Karen Brown:

If you take all of the medications that your healthcare providers have prescribed for you under that definition, but you take that antacid or a headache remedy, or maybe you take CBD to help you sleep at night, then you are counted on the polypharmacy list. Do you understand? That is a very important list that you don't want to be on. If you are on that list, you need to make sure that everybody is aware, everybody being your healthcare practitioner, and you need to make sure you are aware of the side effects of this group of medications.

Karen Brown:

Whatever definition you are using, multiple drugs, not a good thing. They are associated with cognitive impairment and with falls. Now falling is something I have about 25 years of experience with. Fall and injury prevention. I can tell you that a bad fall is the quickest way to lose your independent. You need to be proactive and make sure that you are taking care of the things that may be making you dizzy or lightheaded, or maybe having interactions with the other things that you're taking.

Karen Brown:

Everything has a bad side effect or a bad consequence potential. Let's face it. Unless you are a chemist, you likely do not know what the ingredients are in those long unpronounceable names that are in the medications you take, even if they are off the shelf. You won't know what's causing that rash, or what's making you lightheaded if you don't understand what you're taking very thoroughly and understand how it interacts with everything else.

Karen Brown:

When you go to the emergency your room and let's face it, we will all be there at one time or another, that team is going to want as much information as you can possibly give them. The more time that you save for them, the more time that they will be able to spend understanding the diagnosis and getting you on the treatment plan to make you better. Now, if you're in the emergency room, you're probably flustered. It's a traumatic event that is going on. It could be confusing.

Karen Brown:

You might not be able to remember all the medications that you're taking. Probably you will not be able to. Will your partner? Will your adult child who be called when you go to the emergency room? Will they understand what you're taking? Probably not. And it's understandable. Here's the kicker. What if you're unconscious? Then you really can't tell them.

Karen Brown:

Here's what I want you to consider doing. When you have a really a quiet period of time, an hour or two to yourself, I want you to get out every medication that is in your medicine cabinet, everything that your healthcare team has prescribed for you, everything you take. It may not be on a daily basis, if you take it

two or three times a week, it should be on the table in front of you. Every CBD product, every herbal tea, every cannabis item that you buy, use.

Karen Brown:

This is no time to be shy. Get it all out there. This is your health we're talking about, particularly in an emergency situation. If you have a membership to theoldish.com, I want you to go there and under the toolkit, choose medication checklist. This is something you can do on your computer, your laptop, your tablet, whatever you've got, you can even do it on your phone. It'll work. If you don't have a membership to The Oldish, go get one. It's free.

Karen Brown:

You do need to establish a password because it's none of my business or the business of anybody on my team to know what you might put on a medication checklist or any of the other documents that can be found at theoldish.com in that toolkit. When I designed this medication checklist, I wanted it to be editable so that you wouldn't have to constantly be repeating what you had already done.

Karen Brown:

If a doctor added a medication or took away a medication or changed a dosage, I wanted you to be able to just go to the checklist and change that one thing. I wanted it to be printable so that you could print it out and take it with you to every medical appointment and to every visit to the pharmacy where you're picking up or choosing medications. I wanted you to be able to print it out and put it on your refrigerator or in whatever way your local EMS has instructed you to make your medication list available to them in an emergency should they have to enter your house and maybe you can't tell them where it is.

Karen Brown:

I wanted it to be shareable so that you could email a copy to your healthcare provider, so that you could email to your partner or to your adult child who maybe has some legal medical right to participate in your evaluations and treatment. They need access to that. I had an emergency room physician review this medication checklist before we went live with it, just to make sure it was good. It was in the draft stages. He told me he wished everybody who came through the doors of his ER had a list just like that.

Karen Brown:

It would save so much time reaching a diagnosis and getting a treatment designed and underway. He also told me that in the absence of a list, the EMS, at least in the area where he practiced, would typically do this. Stabilize the patient, and then go to the medicine cabinet with a bag and empty everything from the medication cabinet into this bag and bring it to the hospital. And then the healthcare professionals there would have to sort out medications and together with the blood work, try to figure out what's in your system.

Karen Brown:

There is a better way. This is precious time that could be designed for your treatment, not for trying to figure out what's wrong. If you don't want to use the medication checklist list at theoldush.com, it's fine. What's important is that have a checklist. Make your own or find another one online. At the time when I designed this checklist, which was, gosh, probably seven or eight years ago, I couldn't find anything that

was really viable online. It didn't have room for allergies. Ours does. You put your allergies there, you put your doctor's name, you put your next of kin.

Karen Brown:

There's room for all kinds of things. It's a really great checklist. Trust me. But like I said, what's important is that you should have a checklist. Make yourself one. Here comes the part where you advocate for yourself. Take this checklist with you to every healthcare appointment that you have. Discuss your list with your doctor at every appointment. Do you still need to be taking all of these medications? Are the dosages correct? If something's being added, does something need to be taken away or dosages adjusted?

Karen Brown:

You need to have that conversation. You can ask about interactions, but the best person to ask about interactions between medications is actually going to be your pharmacist. When you go to pick up any medications, even if it's just a repeat of the script, take your list with you. If there's something new on it, ask the pharmacist about interactions. They're very well schooled about that.

Karen Brown:

Ask if your list of medications and dosages are still appropriate. You can ask that of your healthcare team. You can ask that of the pharmacist. If anybody raises any red flags, deal with it. You can ask about the interactions. As I said, don't forget to add any new medications to the medication checklist. Renovations aren't always about building. Sometimes they're about making adjustments to the life you're currently living. You're thinking of your activities, because what we want to do is make your life better for you. This is a really important thing that you can do to advocate for yourself and renovate your life all at the same time. Thanks for tuning in everybody. Join us again next week. I'll see you then. Bye.