



Situational Safety: Medicine Cabinets

Chances are good, especially if you're an adult, that there is more in your medicine cabinet than just Coumadin[®] (warfarin). Adults are on many medications for a variety of short- and long-term health conditions. One national study found that almost 80% of warfarin patients 65 years and older take six or more additional prescription medications.¹ Keeping medications organized is essential to drug safety and requires careful planning.

The following tips are provided to help patients organize their medicine cabinets:

- Keep prescriptions in their original containers.**
- Keep bottles firmly sealed to prevent spilling.**
- Discard outdated medications, especially antibiotics.**
- Fill pillboxes at the same time each week.**
- Discard any tablets that you cannot identify.**

Medication use errors and drug interactions are common reasons warfarin patients are admitted to the emergency room.² Drug interactions result in unwanted side effects, which often occur when a patient is not organized and does not take medication as directed.

The use of a pillbox is one good strategy to keep medications organized. To reduce confusion, medications that are not taken daily can be stored separately from those taken daily. Pain relief creams should be treated like prescription medications, as they may interact with warfarin.³

Most patients store prescription medication alongside vitamins, over-the-counter medications, and supplements. Non-prescription products can be easily confused with prescription drugs since few medications have the name of the product imprinted on the tablet. The combination of prescription drugs, vitamins, and dietary supplements makes organizing the different shapes, colors, and sizes of these tablets a challenge. Most retail pharmacies offer a variety of tools for medication organization. When in doubt about a medication, always call your doctor's office or pharmacy and never hazard a guess.

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- 1 Brandeis University Schneider Institute for Health Policy. (2001). Health Improvement Report (Winter ed.) [Brochure]. Irving, TX: AdvancePCS
- 2 Newman, D. and Zhitomirsky, I. (2006). The prevalence and non-therapeutic and dangerous internalized normalized ratios Among patients receiving warfarin in the emergency department. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 48 (2), 182-189.
- 3 Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. (2007). *Medication Guide for Coumadin Tablets and Coumadin for Injection* [Package Insert]. Princeton, NJ: Bristol-Myers Squibb Company.

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