



# Poison Prevention Month



## Accidental Poisonings Can Happen During Day-to-Day Routines

With more than 90 percent of poisonings occurring in the home and more than 19 million Americans caring for someone over the age of 75, caregivers and family members of children and seniors play a critical role in prevention of poisonings.

An estimated 44 percent of Americans have an aging parent and a young child for whom they care for. The majority of non-fatal poisonings occur in children younger than six years old and seniors who take multiple medications are at increased risk of accidental poisonings.

To help prevent poisonings from happening, The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) has developed practical tips for caregivers of children and seniors.

### For caregivers of seniors, ASHP recommends following these six tips:

- **Keep a list of your medicines.** A written record of medications including medication name, dosage, and frequency, is an important tool to have during physician visits and in case of an emergency. It is also important to record any over-the-counter (OTC) medications, vitamins, supplements, or herbal products are being taken. Having a family member or caregiver keep a copy of this list is also invaluable.
- **Communicate.** Stay informed of all medications, including non-prescription medicines and dietary supplements; this will help reduce the chances of an interaction.
- **Learn about their medicines.** Ask the doctor or pharmacist to explain each medication, the food and medicines to be avoided, and possible reactions and side effects. Family members or caregivers should also be given this information.
- **Use one pharmacy.** Many seniors receive prescriptions from more than one doctor, making drug interactions more likely. By using one pharmacy, all of the prescrip-

tions are consolidated and the pharmacist can check for possible interactions between medicines. It is still important, however, to keep in mind that over-the-counter medicines should also be considered, as overdoses could occur this way.

- **Keep a journal.** Make note of all symptoms, especially after taking medicines. Painful or unexpected side effects such as dizziness, nausea, or drowsiness, may signal a need for adjusting the medication regimen.
- **Maintain a schedule.** Holding to a routine can decrease the chances of missing dosages or taking more than needed. The use of a pillbox may help with this.

### For caregivers of children, ASHP recommends following these five tips:

- Use original child-resistant containers. Use child-resistant closures on medicines and other products and always keep all medications (both prescription, nonprescription, and dietary supplements) in their original child-resistant containers.
- Always call medicine "medicine". Avoid calling medicine "candy" in order to get the child to take the medicine.
- Check your medicines periodically for expiration dates. If a medication is not dated, consider it expired six months after purchase.
- Avoid putting medicines in open trash containers. This is especially important in the kitchen or bathroom because many adult medications can be deadly to small children.
- Keep medications secure. Keep all medicines, including OTC's, herbals, vitamins, and supplements, out of reach of children, or in a locked cabinet.

