

Medication checkup

New program
MedsCheck offers
free half-hour
review with
a pharmacist

Johanna Weidner

WATERLOO REGION — Managing medication can be tricky for anyone who has more than just a few prescriptions.

Many questions can emerge from a packed medicine cabinet: Is there an ideal time to take each drug?

Are there ways to reduce side-effects? Can over-the-counter drugs be taken safely as well?

People can ask questions and get advice from an expert during a free comprehensive medication review through a provincial program.

Through MedsCheck, people who take three or more prescription medications for chronic conditions are eligible to meet with a pharmacist for an annual 30-minute review of their medications.

Waterloo pharmacist Cathy Schill considers the MedsCheck program a fantastic way for people to learn more about their medications and have any worries addressed.

"I think the value of it is immeasurable," Schill said.

Almost always during a review, she's told about a concern a patient has not discussed before with a health care provider.

For instance, a person stopped taking blood pressure medication because he didn't think he suffered from hypertension, or a person who had an unusual physical complaint but didn't connect it with a medication.

"These are the things you find out when you sit down with people," Schill said.

Often people don't feel comfortable asking many questions after their physician scribbles a prescription.



Pharmacist Cathy Schill says a provincial program that allows people on three or more drugs to have a free half-hour consultation with a pharmacist has "immeasurable" value.

During a MedsCheck appointment, the pharmacist will ask basic questions about a person's medication, if it's taken as prescribed and if over-the-counter medication is being taken as well.

If a person has stopped taking a medication because of unwanted side-effects, the pharmacist can offer tips on reducing those or discuss an alternative medicine that could be suggested to the prescribing doctor.

To make sure a patient's medications are working as well as they should, Schill can make a chart about the best time to take each one.

Some pills need to be with food, others on an empty stomach, some late at night because they cause drowsiness and some must be taken alone.

Just explaining the basics, such as how a drug works, can do wonders to reassure a patient. And of course education is a big component since misunderstandings and myths around medications are common.

Potentially dangerous combinations of medication, such as taking two drugs that work similarly, can be discovered during the review.

Often these duplications are found when a prescription is filled, but that's only if a person always goes to the same drug store.

Even those who are well with only a small number of medications can benefit from a pharmacist appointment, Schill said, because it gives them the time to air any concerns they didn't think to immediately ask their doctor.

People are eligible for an appointment once a year, although a follow-up may be allowed for a person scheduled for hospital admission, recently discharged from hospital or who has a significant change in medication therapy.

MedsCheck started as a pilot program in summer 2007, and within two years almost 400,000 Ontarians signed up for appointments.

Learn more about MedsCheck by calling 1-866-255-6701.

Mercury news services

Good posture puts things in proper place

Take a look at your posture. The way you stand and sit may give you some answers as to why you always have neck, shoulder and hip or leg discomfort. Your posture has a lot more impact on your health and well-being than you may think. How do people see you? Poor posture can make you look older than you are.

Good posture elongates the spine, enables us to breathe easier and take in more oxygen and enhances our appearance. Whether standing or sitting, good posture distributes the force of gravity throughout the body in order that no one part of the body is overstressed.

Take the mirror test

Front view: Stand facing a full-length mirror and check to see if: Your shoulders are level, your head is straight and the spaces between your arms and sides seem equal, your hips are level, your kneecaps face straight ahead, and your ankles are straight.



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Side View: This is much easier to do with the help of someone. Check for the following: head is erect, not slumping forward or backwards; chin is parallel to the floor, not tilting up or down; shoulders are in line with ears, not drooping forward or pulled back; stomach is flat, knees are straight, lower back has a slightly forward curve — not too flat or not curved too much forward, creating a hollow back.

How do you feel? Is your body tight, tensed? Relax. Where are your shoulders? They should be held back with your chest forward, a natural feel, not exaggerated. How does your abdomen feel? Pull it in and

you automatically straighten your torso. The key to good posture is body awareness and a strong core.

What does good posture look like? While standing straight, imagine an invisible puppet string holding you in place. Feet are flat, the back is straight and the head is properly aligned over the body. The spine should have a slight S curve.

When we're sitting, we focus on what's in front of us. If we push our neck forward, our body follows and we're no longer balanced. It increases muscle fatigue and stretches the spinal ligaments, which can lead to back and neck pain.

Sitting at a desk is another area where proper posture is important. As much as possible, have the reading material held away from you, preferably at eye level if possible. If writing or working on a keyboard, try to keep your head over the upper body even if you have to lean forward for a short period of time. Always keep your back straight even if leaning forward. A great


investment if you do a lot of sitting is an ergonomic chair, or place a small pillow or rolled-up towel at the small of your back.

Benefits of good posture

- improves overall appearance
- confidence booster
- aids in digestion
- helps to prevent back and neck pain
- strengthens, energizes and revitalizes the body
- helps to prevent sciatica
- helps to prevent a rounded upper back

There are many great fitness and exercise programs that can help correct your posture. A few simple moves can change the way you feel, look and live. It is never too late to correct bad posture.

Guelph-based personal trainer Marla Arndt owns and operates Frameworks Fitness Studio. She can be reached via her website at www.frameworksfitness.com. Her column appears every other week.




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