

TAPER - Reducing our Medications as we Get Older

Medication side effects and interactions between medications are very common in older adults. This is because aging affects our ability to process medications and our resistance to adverse effects.

Adults aged 75 years and older are likely to be on multiple medications for various conditions. When a person is taking five or more medications, the likelihood of the medications doing more harm than good rises significantly. This is called '*polypharmacy*' and is associated with significant increase in the risk of falls, changes in thinking ability, nutrition problems, fatigue and other symptoms.

TAPER is a programme which aims to reduce medication use and drug side effects in older adults using the best medical evidence and taking account of the individual's preferences and priorities for their treatment. The goal is to improve the individual's quality of life.

The TAPER programme is free for adults aged over 75 and who are on five or more medications.

By joining the TAPER programme, your health care providers will work with you and your family / whānau to discuss your preferences and priorities, review your current medications, and identify how these might be changed.

Your health care providers will identify any changes that could be made and discuss these with you. Changes could include putting on hold medications where the harm may outweigh the benefit, either alone or in combination with your other medications, and drugs that may be no longer necessary.

With your agreement, a plan will be made for changing, reducing, or stopping medications, where appropriate. Once your plan is put in place you will have regular appointments with your health care providers to monitor and discuss your progress.

It may be that at the end of the process, you and your health care providers find that you are on exactly the right medications and that no changes are necessary. It doesn't hurt to check.

Below are some questions that you and your family might think about and discuss to help you decide if joining the TAPER programme is right for you:

- How do I feel about the medications that I am currently taking?
- Am I experiencing side effects caused by a medication and how do I feel about this?
- What would I like to be able to do that I can't do right now because of the medications that I am taking?
- Do my medications reflect my priorities for care?
- Do I still need all my medications or can some of them be reduced or stopped?

If you would like to join the TAPER programme, please contact your health care provider to make an appointment. Your family / whānau can attend the appointment.