What Should I Know About Medication Deprescribing?

What Is Deprescribing?
It is common for people to be prescribed many medications and also to take over-the-counter treatments, vitamins, or supplements. Medications are often started for a good reason, but sometimes they are continued when they are no longer helpful and may cause adverse effects. Slowly and carefully cutting down on unnecessary medications with a health care professional is called deprescribing.

Why Might My Medications Be Deprescribed?
Your health care professional may advise you to reduce the dose or stop taking a medication because it is not providing substantial benefit, or because the medication carries considerable risk of negative health effects. Deprescribing might happen in the emergency department or hospital, especially if a medication adverse effect caused an acute health problem.

What Are the Benefits of Deprescribing?
Taking fewer medications can make people feel better for several reasons. Getting rid of unnecessary medications lowers the number of pills you have to take every day. Eliminating extra pills may save you money. Taking fewer pills may increase your ability to reliably take the medications that do provide benefit. Deprescribing might decrease the risk of dangerous adverse effects and improve your quality of life.

How Will I Know Which Medications to Deprescribe?
There are many reasons why your health care professional may deprescribe a medication. Sometimes the health condition is now adequately treated without medications, such as through changes in exercise and diet. The way your body processes some medications can change with age, leading to more risks than benefits. The chance of having multiple medical health conditions increases with age, along with multiple medications to treat each condition. This can lead to potentially harmful medication interactions.

Is It Safe to Deprescribe Medications?
Deprescribing is safe under the supervision of a health care professional. Some medications can be safely stopped immediately. Others need to be slowly decreased, or “tapered,” a bit at a time. Tapering can help your body get used to not taking certain medications, preventing any withdrawal effects. Most vitamins and supplements can be stopped immediately with no health risks.

Medication deprescribing occurs when you and your health care provider work together to stop unnecessary medications, vitamins, or supplements. Deprescribing is safe under supervision of a health care provider who can guide you through stopping medications immediately or decreasing dosage slowly to prevent withdrawal effects.

Reasons for deprescribing include
- A medication is no longer providing benefit or is causing unwanted side effects
- A health condition has been controlled without medications
- Risk of harmful medication interactions has increased due to new or changed medications
- The way your body reacts to a medication has changed

Other benefits of deprescribing include
- Decreasing the number of pills you take every day
- Lowering the overall cost of your daily medications

What Are Common Examples of Deprescribing?
Some medications may be deprescribed because they do not have any benefit (eg, stool softeners, certain supplements and vitamins). Other medications may be deprescribed because they can have dangerous adverse effects. Some medications may be deprescribed because long-term use can lead to health problems. Some medical conditions do not need to be as tightly controlled with age. For example, it is possible to deprescribe some medications for diabetes, cholesterol, or high blood pressure.

How Do I Know If Deprescribing Is Right For Me?
Ask your health care professionals to regularly review your medications with you at your visits. Consider it a “medication checkup.” This can help to identify when medications are causing more harm than good and lead to deprescribing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Canadian Medication Appropriateness and Deprescribing Network
https://www.deprescribingnetwork.ca/deprescribing
US Deprescribing Research Network
https://deprescribingresearch.org/for-patients/