

Home medicine reviews

When you have diabetes, it is always important to keep up the things that keep you well such as taking all the medications you have been prescribed. Remember the ABC's? Controlling blood glucose levels and blood pressure, keeping on track with cholesterol, taking a daily low dose aspirin and not smoking. All of this is combined with healthy food and exercise to help keep you healthy, and medications can form a crucial part of the process.

Taking the right medicines the right way improves your health and helps you maintain your independence. Sometimes, however, you may not be getting the full benefit of your medicines or, more seriously, they can occasionally make you sicker. This can happen if medicines are taken incorrectly. Sometimes though, it can also happen if you take prescription medicines together with other health care products not realising that they should not be taken together.

With this in mind it might be a good time to talk to your doctor or community pharmacist about having a Home Medicines Review (HMR). A HMR will help you to use your medicines more effectively and to avoid unwanted effects. A HMR provides an opportunity for a specially trained pharmacist to sit down with you to discuss any issues or questions you may have regarding your medications, including those that you buy over the counter at your pharmacy, from a health food shop or a supermarket.

The good thing about this is that there are no interruptions – you have the pharmacist's undivided attention so you can ask lots of questions about anything related to the medications you are taking.

If you think this is a good idea, ask your community pharmacist about HMR. The pharmacy can provide you with some written information to take to your doctor to help you to discuss whether a HMR is appropriate, and if so the doctor will provide a referral that you can take back to your local pharmacy so that the home visit can be arranged.

If the visit to your home is not possible, the pharmacist may be able to see you in the pharmacy.

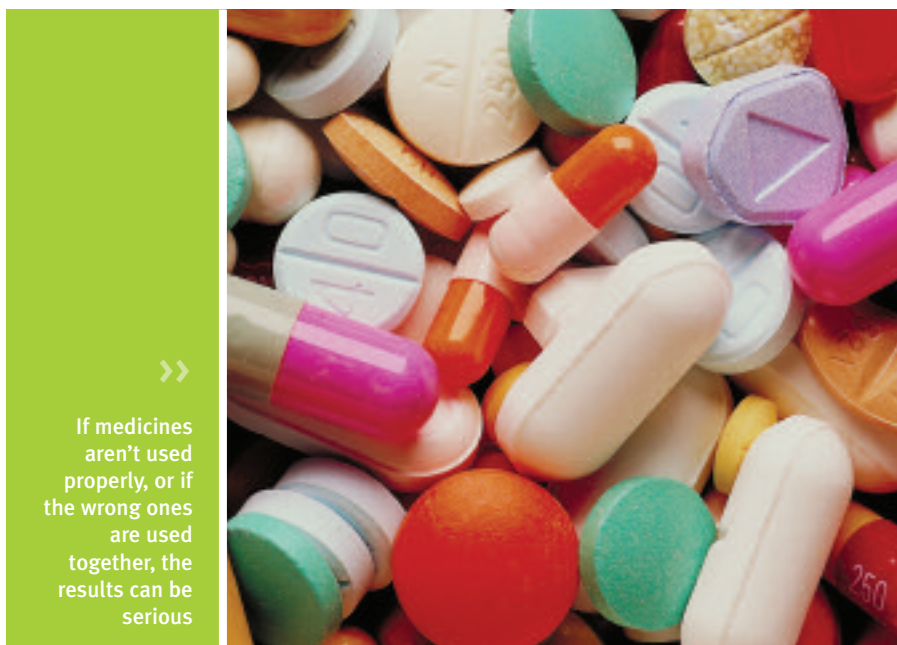
WHY HAVE A HMR?

Here are some questions to ask yourself to see if a HMR may help:

- **Do you know your medicines?** If medicines aren't used properly, or if the wrong ones are used together, the results can be serious. Each year more than 140,000 Australians go to hospital with medication related problems. It has been shown that in many of these cases, the problem can be avoided with greater education about medication. Older people are particularly at risk as they tend to take more medications.
- **Am I taking more than 5 medicines a day?** This includes medications that you buy from a pharmacy, over the counter, from a health food shop or supermarket.
- **Am I confused or worried about my medicines?** You may have started on some new medications and are not sure what they are for or how to take them.
- **Have I recently spent time in hospital?** Some new medications may have been started in hospital or other medications stopped and you may still be adjusting to the new routine.
- **Do I sometimes forget to take my medication?** A pharmacist visiting in your home can give you some ideas to help with remembering to take your medications.
- **Do I see more than one GP or specialist?** If you see a number of doctors, a HMR can make sure that everything you are taking is known by your GP and community pharmacist which can help to avoid any complications.

HOW DOES A HMR WORK?

A HMR is simple and easy to organise, just follow the 4 steps below:



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1. See your GP about a HMR referral.
2. Take the referral to your local pharmacy.
3. Arrange a time for a pharmacist to visit in your home.
4. Make an appointment to see your GP to discuss the HMR.

Start by asking your GP for a referral for a HMR to your regular local pharmacy then make an appointment with your local pharmacist at a time that suits you both. During the HMR the pharmacist will sit down with you to talk about the medications you are taking. Some things that the pharmacist can discuss with you may include:

- Suggesting the safest ways to take your medicines.
- Explaining why and when to take them and where your medications should be stored.
- Checking that prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines and vitamins are safe to take together.
- Discussing any confusion with generic medicines.

After this visit the pharmacist writes a report back to the GP highlighting the issues that have been discussed with you.

When you next visit your GP, you can talk about any recommendations from the pharmacist's report with them and may make any changes to your medications if needed.

Importantly, a HMR cannot be done without your consent and you always get to choose the pharmacy you take the HMR referral to. A HMR is nothing to worry about and is not a way of "checking up on you".

ARE YOU A CARER?

If you are a carer, the person you care for may benefit from a HMR. If so, talk to their doctor or pharmacist.

IS THERE A FEE FOR THIS SERVICE?

There is no charge for the pharmacist visit; the Australian Government will pay the pharmacist to visit your home. Your GP's service for the referral may be

directly billed to Medicare or you can claim a Medicare rebate, as with any other consultation.

If you would like more information on the HMR program or any other issues you have with your medications, talk to your local pharmacist or doctor. And remember, the more you know about your medications, the more confident you will feel about controlling the ABC's of diabetes.

*Written by Angela Close and Dr Pat Phillips. Angela is a pharmacist working with the Adelaide Northern Division of General Practice in Adelaide facilitating the Home Medicines Review and National Prescribing Service programs. Pat is Senior Director of Endocrinology at North Western Adelaide Health Service. In his work on diabetes Pat has worked with and on behalf of people who live with diabetes and closely with all those who are involved in helping them live with their condition. **G***