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# MEDICATION MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY

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Let's talk about medication safety from an occupational therapy student's point of view

Natalie McFarren is a third-year University of North Dakota occupational therapy doctorate student completing her capstone with Safe Kids Grand Forks this spring. While Natalie's capstone project emphasizes the importance of safe sleep practices, she was also asked to give her take on the role of occupational therapy with regard to medication management and safety.

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# Occupational Therapy and Medication Management

Occupational therapy (OT) professionals are trained to support medication management as part of everyday activities. But how do OTs make sure people can access their medications safely and use them correctly to complete activities of daily living (ADLs)? Many people struggle with taking medications the correct way, specifically about half of individuals do not take their medications as prescribed. This can be dangerous and may lead to serious health problems. Additionally, it could lead to accidental poisoning for the individual or others around them if they are not used or stored properly.

The role of OT in medication management is to help individuals follow their medication routines correctly and safely. OTs also look for barriers that make medication management difficult, such as memory challenges, limited vision, or trouble opening containers. Occupational therapists consider many client factors that may affect performance and work with other healthcare professionals to create an individualized, evidence-based plan.

After evaluating factors such as current medication routines, habits, and the person's environment, the OT develops an intervention plan to address any challenges. Interventions vary based on the individual's needs. OTs may work to improve skills when possible or provide compensatory strategies, such as pill organizers, reminders, or environmental changes, when challenges are more complex. Through these approaches, OTs help promote both safety and independence in medication management.

## Examples of Compensatory Strategies

Strategies for medication management for individuals with cognitive, sensory, or dexterity concerns:

1. Automatic pill dispenser
2. Electronic reminders
3. Visual cues such as sticky notes
4. Auditory cues such as a phone alarm
5. Pill organizers or pill pouches
6. Large print or color-coded bottles

For those who are concerned with accidental poisoning of **young children** in the home, here are some additional strategies:

- Automatic pill dispensers that only release the necessary number of pills at a time
- Advanced locking pill station with motorized carousel and additional security options
- Keep any medications stored in an area that cannot be easily accessed (i.e., locked cabinet or closet, a medicine safe, high shelf)

