

# healthsmart!

## What to Do if You Have Multiple Medical Problems

### Who has multiple medical problems?

Millions of Americans have multiple medical problems—two or more medical conditions that require the care of different doctors. For example, a patient may see different doctors to manage his arthritis, diabetes and stroke recovery. The percentage of Americans with multiple medical problems increases with age, ranging from 10 percent of those age 0-19 years old to almost 80 percent for those more than 80 years old. About 20 percent of Medicare beneficiaries have five or more chronic medical problems. Treatments for multiple medical problems must be managed together to prevent harmful risks that may result when caring for separate illnesses on an individual basis.

### What are the results of multiple medical problems?

- Diagnostic tests or drugs for one condition may create unexpected negative side effects with other conditions.
- Patients with multiple medical problems are more likely to have complications, be readmitted to the hospital, spend more time in the hospital and need more resources than patients being treated for one condition.
- Surgery and other treatments for one problem are often delayed until the second problem is under control.

### Example of someone with a multiple medical problem

Susan Citizen, 52, has struggled with severe asthma since childhood. In her 30s, she developed high blood pressure and was later diagnosed with diabetes in her 40s. Now in her 50s, she was recently diagnosed with heart disease. In addition to visiting her family doctor, Susan sees a separate specialist for each of her medical conditions: asthma, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Taking five different medications, she averages several visits to a different doctor each month for her medical care.

- Patients often require the collaboration of several specialists to effectively manage multiple medical problems.
- Patients with multiple medical problems are less likely to be satisfied with their quality of life.

### Who can diagnose and treat multiple problems?

Advanced medical centers like UK HealthCare have access to expert physicians, nurses and other health care professionals. These centers lead the way for improving the quality of care and

introducing new and better ways to take care of patients. An organization that sees many patients with multiple problems develops familiarity with their special challenges.

Because many patients with multiple problems are age 65 or older, an organization with a focus on seniors is important. For example, UK HealthCare is home to the internationally recognized Sanders-Brown Center on Aging.

## Questions to ask your doctor

- Will two or more doctors be involved in my care?
- How experienced are the doctors in handling the combination of problems I have?
- How experienced are the doctors in working together?
- How will my care be coordinated?
- Are complications likely, and if so, what are they?
- How quickly can I expect to get better?
- Should I get a second opinion?
- If new drugs are given during my treatment, how will they interact with current drugs and what are the side effects?

## Helpful tips

Keep a written record of your medical history.

- Doctors' names and phone numbers
- Illnesses and diagnosis dates
- Medications
- Alternative treatments
- Surgeries
- Problem, questions and concerns

## Common diseases for Kentuckians with multiple medical problems

- Diabetes
- Lung diseases
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stroke
- Depression
- Arthritis

## UK HealthCare

UK HealthCare includes UK Hospital, Kentucky Children's Hospital, Kentucky Clinic, Kentucky Clinic North, Kentucky Clinic South, 80 specialized clinics, 143 outreach programs and a team of 6,000 physicians, nurses, pharmacists and health care workers all dedicated to your health. As part of an academic medical center, we work together with the Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Health Sciences, Dentistry and Public Health to ensure you receive the highest quality health care and have the latest health care information.

The unique capabilities of this multispecialty group practice enables care providers of UK HealthCare to collaborate in multidisciplinary teams for patient care. Such teams are useful for managing complex medical and surgical cares.

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Call UK Health Connection at (859) 257-1000 or toll free (800) 333-8874 to make an appointment or request a referral. Visit us online at [ukhealthcare.uky.edu](http://ukhealthcare.uky.edu).

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