

Deprescribing and Safe Medication Use in Long-Term Care For Health Care Providers

What is deprescribing?

Deprescribing means reducing or stopping medications that are no longer beneficial or may be causing harm. One of the goals of deprescribing is to maintain or improve quality of life.¹

Deprescribing involves a partnership and shared decision making between residents, care providers, families, and healthcare practitioners to reach decisions that align with [what matters to the resident](#).

Why is deprescribing important for residents and families?

On average, seniors living in LTC facilities were prescribed ~ 10 drug classes in 2016, compared with ~7 among those living in the community.²

Taking multiple medications may increase the risk of medication harm like memory loss, falls, fractures, hospitalizations, and death.¹

Older persons respond to and handle drugs differently than younger adults, making them more susceptible to harm. This often requires doses be reduced, or medications stopped if potential harm outweighs benefit.

Changes in a resident activity level and/or goals of care may prompt the need for updates to medication regimens.

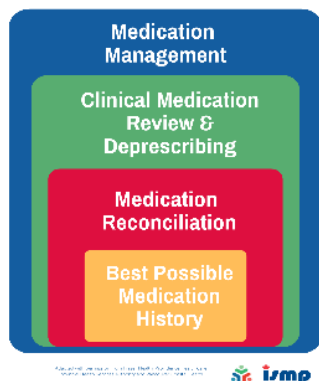


Figure 1. [Medication Management in LTC](#)

How can deprescribing be integrated into medication management?

Most residents and caregivers are willing to discuss deprescribing.

A resident's medication regimen should be reconciled and rationalized at periodic intervals (e.g., quarterly medication reviews or QMR). The QMR is an ideal time to review medications for appropriateness and opportunities for deprescribing medications that have more potential harms than benefits. (See Figure 1). Pharmacists can help by providing specific recommendations to the prescriber regarding deprescribing and documenting the decisions.

Discussions about optimizing medications should be part of every care conference and on an as needed basis. Resident-centred tools can be used to communicate the risks and benefits of deprescribing (e.g., [Shared Decision Making for Medication Management Guide](#), [Do I still need this PPI?](#)) Deprescribing requires close, consistent monitoring of the resident to ensure that the medication taper or discontinuation improves resident symptoms and does not worsen their condition.

¹ What is deprescribing? [website] Montreal (Quebec): Canadian Deprescribing Network;2022. [cited 2022 May 24, 2022] Available from: <https://www.deprescribingnetwork.ca/deprescribing>

² Canadian Institute for Health Information. [Drug Use Among Seniors in Canada](#), 2016. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2018

What are the barriers to deprescribing?³

Residents and families may fear that healthcare providers are giving up on them and fear negative consequences of stopping.

Prescribers may fear clinical consequences of reducing or stopping medications and in turn may take a “don’t rock the boat” approach. Although there is guidance on when to start drugs, there is more uncertainty about stopping medications, especially for residents with complex medical conditions.

Poor communication and lack of resident/family involvement during the deprescribing process are other important barriers that can be overcome by having the prescriber take the time to explain the rationale for stopping medications and reminding residents and caregivers of the follow-up by the prescriber, nurse, and other members of the health care team that will occur.

Deprescribing Resources and Tools (alphabetical order*)

- [Brochures about the risks of certain medications classes \(Canadian Deprescribing Network\)](#) – Easy to read and understand brochures to help residents and families understand why deprescribing should be considered.
- [Choosing Wisely in Long Term Care](#) toolkit
- [Deprescribing: Managing Medications to Reduce Polypharmacy](#) - ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin
- [Deprescribing Guidelines and Algorithms \(deprescribing.org\)](#) for clinicians to support and embed deprescribing and tapering regimens into clinical practice.
- [Ontario Deprescribing in LTC Initiative \(deprescribing.org\)](#) - Tools and resources envisioned and co-designed with stakeholders across Ontario’s LTC sector to support deprescribing and shared decision making.
- Deprescribing and medication management software (e.g., [MedSafer](#), [TaperMD](#)) integrated into most electronic health records.
- [“Is it time to review your medication?”](#) is a brochure for the public explaining the importance of regular medication reviews and deprescribing.
- Read [Judith’s story](#) or hear [Judith’s story](#) and [Susan’s story](#) about the impact of polypharmacy and deprescribing on their lives.
- Websites - [ACB calculator](#), [Alberta Tools for Practice](#), [GeriRxFiles](#), [MedStopper](#), [Therapeutics Initiative](#)

*Where a product is referenced, ISMP Canada does not endorse one product over another.

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³ Peat G, Fylan B, Marques I, Raynor DK, Breen L, Olaniyan J, Alldred DP. [Barriers and facilitators of successful deprescribing as described by older patients living with frailty, their informal carers and clinicians: a qualitative interview study](#). BMJ Open. 2022 Mar 28;12(3):e054279.