

Preventive drugs press pause on frailty in older Australians

28 June 2019, by Annabel Mansfield



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Older Australians are being cautioned to consult their doctor before stopping the use of preventive medicines in a bid to reduce frailty and adverse health outcomes among older people.

The call comes after an Australian first study by the University of South Australia found that ceasing preventive medicines can significantly raise the chance of frailty among people aged over 65.

Preventive medicines are drugs that are designed to avert and avoid disease. Commonly prescribed to [older people](#), preventive medicines help reduce the risk of heart attack, angina, stroke, or [heart failure](#) by controlling factors like [high blood pressure](#) and high blood cholesterol.

In Australia, there are 250,000 hospital admissions each year resulting from [medicine](#)-related problems, with older Australians comprising a disproportionate number of these cases.

Lead researcher, Dr. Imaina Widagdo says improving the safe use of medicines in older people is essential if we are to help them maintain

better health.

"Frailty is a clinically recognizable state of weakened ability to cope with everyday stressors. It's also a precursor for significant health decline," Dr. Widagdo says.

"We know that certain medicines can negatively impact a person's frailty, but this study has also shown that not taking certain medicines can also affect a person's frailty.

"By understanding the relationship between medicines and frailty we're able to provide more answers to improve the quality of older peoples' lives."

Using data from the [Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing](#), the study assessed a population-based cohort of 2087 participants aged 65 years and older, calculating medicine use and frailty scores over three years.

The study found that people who stopped using specific preventive medicines such as [beta blockers](#) or potassium-sparing diuretics (both used to treat high blood pressure) had a significantly higher increase in frailty scores than those who continued to use them. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke, cardiovascular disease, and kidney disease, therefore appropriate management of high [blood](#) pressure is key in improving health outcomes.

Dr. Widagdo says the research highlights the importance of needing to carefully manage your medicines and to discuss any changes with your practitioner before you make them.

"Managing medicines can be complicated, especially for older people who often juggle multiple prescriptions and doses," Dr. Widagdo says.

"But stopping a medicine without prior medical

advice can be dangerous and has the potential to lead to adverse health outcomes, including falls, hospitalisations, and even death.

"By detecting the potential for [frailty](#) associated with medicine use, we're able to better inform both older Australians and practitioners, so that together, we can help people live better for longer."

Provided by University of South Australia

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