

Polypharmacy: Use of Multiple Anticholinergic Medications in Older Adults

Displayed as: Polypharmacy Anticholinergics

This measure quantifies the percentage of older adults ≥ 65 years old with concurrent use of ≥ 2 unique anticholinergic (ACH) medications for ≥ 30 cumulative days during the measurement year.

- Emerging evidence shows that cumulative exposure to anticholinergic drugs is associated with an increased risk of falls, delirium, and dementia, even in younger adults.¹
- This measure was developed by the Pharmacy Quality Alliance and added as a Medicare Star Rating Measure with weight of 1 beginning in the 2025 measurement year.*

Did You Know?



The American Geriatrics Society Beers Criteria[®] contains a list of medications that are potentially inappropriate for older adults.^{1,2}



Consider total anticholinergic burden during regular medication reviews and be cautious in “young-old” as well as “old-old” adults.¹



ACH medications are associated with multiple side effects, including: cognitive, impairment, confusion, dry mouth, blurred vision, constipation and urinary retention.³

Exclusions

- Enrolled in hospice

Therapeutic Categories

- First-generation Antihistamines
- Antiparkinsonian Agents
- Skeletal Muscle Relaxants
- Antidepressants
- Antipsychotics
- Antiarrhythmics
- Antimuscarinics (urinary incontinence)
- Antispasmodics
- Antiemetics



Calculation

NUMERATOR =

The number of eligible patients with claims for ≥ 2 unique anticholinergic medications overlapping concurrently with the denominator claims for ≥ 30 days

DENOMINATOR =

The number of eligible patients with ≥ 2 claims for the same anticholinergic medication on different dates of service during the measurement year

¹ American Geriatrics Society 2023 updated AGS Beers Criteria[®] for potentially inappropriate medication use in older adults. J Am Geriatr Soc. 2023;71(7):2052-2081. doi:10.1111/jgs.18372

² American Geriatrics Society. For Older People, Medications Are Common; Updated AGS Beers Criteria[®] Aims to Make Sure They're Appropriate, Too | American Geriatrics Society. Americangeriatrics.org. Published 2019. <https://www.americangeriatrics.org/media-center/news/older-people-medications-are-common-updated-ags-beers-criteriar-aims-make-sure>

³John R. Horn P, Philip D. Hansten P. Anticholinergic Drug Interactions. Pharmacy Times. 2015;81(7). <https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/anticholinergic-drug-interactions>

* For more information about Medicare Star Ratings, please visit the [EQUIPP Academy website](https://www.pharmacyquality.com)