

# Drugs for Dementia



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This document has been translated into other languages.  
In case of any discrepancy or inconsistency, the English version shall prevail.

## What are Dementia medicines?

Dementia medications are drugs used to manage symptoms of dementia, particularly Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia. As there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, the primary goals of these treatments are to improve the quality of life for the person with dementia and their caregivers. They can slow cognitive decline, manage behavioral symptoms, and treat specific symptoms or co-occurring conditions.

There are two types of dementia medicines for managing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease:

### ➤ **Acetylcholinesterase (AChE) inhibitors**

(*Donepezil, Galantamine, Rivastigmine*):

These drugs prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine, a brain chemical important for memory and thinking. They are prescribed for mild to moderate Alzheimer's symptoms.

### ➤ **NMDA antagonist (*Memantine*):**

This drug blocks the toxic effects associated with the excess brain chemical called glutamate and regulates its activation. It is prescribed for moderate to severe Alzheimer's symptoms.

Other medicines can also be used in dementia patients with behavioral and psychological symptoms. Antipsychotics and antidepressants may be used to manage symptoms such as anxiety, increased agitation, aggression, delusions and hallucinations.

## What are the common side effects?

| Types of Dementia medicines   | Common side effects  | Remarks   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Acetylcholinesterase inhibitors</b><br><br><i>Donepezil,</i><br><i>Galantamine,</i><br><i>Rivastigmine</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Diarrhea</li><li>➤ Nausea and vomiting</li><li>➤ Decreased appetite</li><li>➤ Headache</li><li>➤ Drowsiness</li><li>➤ Dizziness</li><li>➤ Sleeping disturbance</li><li>➤ Nightmare and abnormal dreams</li><li>➤ Muscle cramps</li></ul> | Take with food, preferably a full meal, to reduce the gastrointestinal effects. |
| <b>NMDA antagonist</b><br><br><i>Memantine</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Headache</li><li>➤ Constipation</li><li>➤ Drowsiness</li><li>➤ Dizziness</li><li>➤ Confusion</li><li>➤ Fatigue</li><li>➤ Weight gain</li><li>➤ Difficulty in passing urine</li></ul>   | Can be taken with or without a meal at the same time each day.                  |

## Can I stop taking my Dementia medicines?

Stopping dementia medicines should not be done without consulting your doctors. These medications are designed to manage symptoms and maintain cognitive function, and abruptly stopping them could lead to a deterioration of symptoms.

## How long do I have to take my Dementia medications?

The duration of treatment varies depending on the individual, the progression of the disease, and the medication prescribed. Your healthcare provider will guide you on the appropriate duration of treatment. It's important to understand that these medications are not a cure but help to manage and slow down the progression of the disease.

When dementia progresses to the stage where the patient becomes completely reliant on others for all basic daily activities, and the original goal of these medications, maintaining cognitive and functional abilities, is no longer attainable, discontinuation of the medication should be considered. However, never attempt to discontinue the medications on your own without guidance from your doctors.

## What should the caregiver do if patient refuses to take their Dementia medications?

If a patient refuses to take their medicine, it's important for caregivers to approach the situation with patience and understanding. Open communication is key. Discuss the importance of the medication, the benefits it provides, and the potential risks of not taking it. If the patient continues to refuse, it may be helpful to involve the doctor or a mental health professional in the conversation. They can provide further information and reassurance, or suggest alternative treatments if necessary. It's crucial to respect the patient's autonomy and feelings while also ensuring their health and safety.

### DO

1. Strictly follow the doctor's instructions
2. Pay attention to the drug name, dosage and frequency, etc. before taking your medication
3. Read the prescription label carefully
4. Pay attention to the dosage, indication, contraindication and side effects
5. Understand the method of administration
6. Store your medication properly
7. Complete the prescribed course unless otherwise directed
8. If you have any questions, talk to your family and ask your health care professionals

### DON'T

1. Change the dosage of your medication on your own
2. Stop taking your medication except on your doctor's advice.
3. Drink alcohol with your medication
4. Put your medication in other bottle.
5. Take other medication unless directed by your doctor.
6. Lie to your doctors about your compliance