

Dementia Medicines: *Will they help?*

Will dementia medicines help?

There is no cure for dementia, but there are medicines that can help manage symptoms or keep the disease from getting worse for a while. Different people experience different results with these medicines, and it's not possible to predict how you or a family member might respond to treatment.

Dementia medicines can reduce certain symptoms. Memantine is one medicine that has been helpful for those suffering severe dementia because it can reduce aggression, delusions, and irritability.

If dementia medicines are going to help, you should see some benefit within 2 months (if taking the highest dose). If they don't seem to be helping, talk to your doctor about slowly stopping (tapering) the medicine.

Some people experience a rapid decline when they stop taking these medicines, even if tapered slowly. These medicines may also cause uncomfortable side effects (**see page 2**).

It is important for you to be realistic about how these medicines may affect you or your loved one's life and condition.



What do I need to do next?

- Talk to my doctor about how dementia medicines may or may not help reduce my symptoms.
- Weigh the possible benefits and side effects of taking medicine for dementia.
- Make a plan to regularly talk to my doctor about starting, continuing, or stopping these medicines.

Do vitamins and supplements help prevent dementia?

Advertisers and others often promote taking various vitamins and supplements to improve thinking (cognition) or delay dementia. At this time, research is limited, and most studies do not show that these supplements prevent or delay dementia.

Here's what we know:

- **Vitamin E:** Some studies show a small delay in decline with 2000 IU per day. Others show no benefit for 800 IU per day.
- **Fish oil, ginkgo biloba, folic acid, B12, B6:** Studies do not show that these supplements either prevent or delay dementia

Always talk to your doctor about vitamins and supplements you are taking and those you are considering taking.

What dementia medicines can my doctor prescribe, and what are the side effects?

The table below shows the medicines your doctor might prescribe and their side effects. Medicines are grouped by the stage of dementia you might be in. For example, all stages might benefit from donepezil, but memantine is only prescribed for moderate-to-severe dementia. These medicines are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the specific stages shown below.

Mild Dementia	Moderate Dementia	Severe Dementia
FDA-approved medicines: Galantamine (brand names: Razadyne or Razadyne ER) or rivastigmine (brand name: Exelon) Side effects: Insomnia and weight loss as well as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (these are less likely with patch than capsule)		
FDA-approved medicine: Donepezil (brand name: Aricept) Side effects: Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and insomnia (with some abnormal dreams or nightmares if taken at night)		
	FDA-approved medicine: Memantine (brand name: Namenda) (may help with aggression, delusions, and irritability) Side effects: Dizziness, headache, and drowsiness	

Several commonly prescribed medicines should not be taken if you or a loved one has been diagnosed with dementia. These medicines make thinking and memory worse:

- oxybutynin (Ditropan)
- amitriptyline (Elavil)
- alprazolam (Xanax)
- diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
- zolpidem (Ambien)



Questions for my doctor

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