

Medication safety

It's important for everyone who takes a medication to understand its purpose and proper usage. Additional measures may be needed to ensure individuals living with dementia take medications as directed. A plan to safely manage prescription and over-the-counter medications is critical to avoid medication-related problems.

Get the facts.

Currently, there is no medication to prevent, cure or slow Alzheimer's disease, but multiple medications may be prescribed to address symptoms of Alzheimer's or treat other conditions commonly associated with the diagnosis, such as depression, anxiety or sleeplessness. When a medication is prescribed or a supplement is recommended, it is important to get the facts about each treatment. This can help ensure you understand all the available options, benefits and risks.

Consider asking your doctor or pharmacist the following questions to help determine the best treatment plan:

- **Purpose of medication.**
Which symptoms will the medication address and are there any warning signs that would indicate the medication is not working as intended?
- **Side effects.**
What are the possible side effects of each medication? Which drug interactions may occur with current medications? Be sure that all members of the care team are aware of the medications prescribed.
- **Appropriate use.**
Medications should only be taken as directed. Ask about proper dosage amounts and delivery methods to maximize the effectiveness of the treatments and prevent accidental overdose. Some medications may be available in liquid form to aid ingestion. Always consult with the prescribing physician or pharmacist before crushing or breaking pills.

Manage medications.

In the early stage of Alzheimer's disease, individuals are able to understand the use of medications and may use reminders such as pill organizers, sticky notes or calendars to independently manage medications. As the disease progresses, more assistance will be required to oversee and administer medications. If multiple medications have been prescribed for other serious health conditions, an organization system is essential to avoid missed or incorrect dosage that could lead to serious consequences.

Consider these tips when managing medications:

- **Stay organized.**
Use a pill box or organizer to sort medication by the day and time in which they should be taken. A friend, family member or pharmacist may be able to

assist with filling the organizer. If this support is not available, consider hiring a home health agency to assist with medication management.

- **Maintain medication records.**

Keep a written record of all current medications, including the name, dosage and starting date. Consider signing up for MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®, a 24-hour emergency response service for individuals living with dementia that provides an online personal health record of your health conditions and current medications. This record is invaluable in the event of a medical emergency.

- **Develop a routine.**

Ask the pharmacist how medications should be taken — at a certain time of the day or with or without food. Then create a daily routine, such as taking medications with meals or before bed.

Avoid risk.

Consult with your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions or concerns about managing medications. Many problems can be prevented by considering the following tips:

- Do not take old medications; check expiration dates and follow instructions for safe disposal.
- Never share prescription medications with others.
- As the disease progresses, keep cabinets and medication storage secure to prevent accidental overdose.
- Keep the number of your local poison control center handy. If you suspect a medication overdose, call poison control or 911 before taking action.

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