
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.

Working with the doctor and pharmacist

- **Coordinate with all care providers.** A person with Alzheimer's may be under the care of more than one doctor. Make sure all health care team members know about any prescription and over-the-counter medications, including herbal or vitamin supplements. Each time you go to an appointment, take a list of current medications and dosages.
- **Ask your doctor or pharmacist to check for possible drug interactions.** When a new medication is prescribed, ask whether it is okay to take it with other current medications. Also, remind the health care team of any allergies to medications or side effects that have occurred in the past.
- **Get details.** Find out as much as possible about every medication, including name, purpose, dosage, frequency and possible side effects. If troubling side effects occur, report them to the doctor.
- **Take as directed.** Do not ever change dosages without first consulting the doctor who prescribed the medication. If cost or side effects are an issue, tell the doctor. There may be other solutions.
- **Maintain medication records.** Keep a written record of all current medications, including the name, dosage and starting date. Carry a medication list with you in your wallet or purse. This record will be invaluable in the event of a serious drug interaction or overdose.

Giving medication to someone with Alzheimer's

In the early stages of Alzheimer's, the person with dementia may need help remembering to take medications. As a caregiver, you may find it helpful to:

- **Use a pill box organizer.** Using a pill box or keeping a daily list or calendar can help ensure medication is taken as prescribed.
- **Develop a routine for giving the medication.** 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.

As the disease progresses, you'll need to provide a greater level of care. In addition to using a pill box organizer and keeping a daily routine, try these tips:

- **Use simple language and clear instructions.** For example, say “Here’s the pill for your high blood pressure. Put it in your mouth and drink some water.”
- **If the person refuses to take the medication, stop and try again later.**
- **If swallowing is a problem, ask if the medication is available in another form.** Talk to the doctor who prescribed the medication or the pharmacist to find out if a liquid version is available or if it is safe to crush the medication and mix it with food. Be aware that no pill or tablet should be crushed without first consulting your physician or pharmacist, since it can cause some medications to be ineffective or unsafe.
- **Make changes for safety.** Be sure to place medications in a locked drawer or cabinet to avoid accidental overdose, and throw out medications that are no longer being used or that have expired. Join **ALZConnected** (alz.org/alzconnected), our online community and message boards, where caregivers exchange ideas and receive support.
- **Have emergency numbers easily accessible.** Keep the number of your local poison control center or emergency room handy. If you suspect a medication overdose, call poison control or 911 before taking any action.

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