

ALZHEIMER'S CAREGIVING

Managing Medicines for a Person with Alzheimer's

People with [Alzheimer's disease](#) may take [medicines to treat the disease](#) itself, mood or behavior changes, and [other medical conditions](#). Caregivers can ensure that medicines are taken safely and correctly. Here are some tips to help you manage medications for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

Learn the Basics

Know each medicine (prescription and over-the-counter) the person with Alzheimer's disease takes.

Ask the doctor or pharmacist:

- Why is this medicine being used?
- What positive effects should I look for, and when?
- How long will the person need to take it?
- How much should he or she take each day?
- When does the person need to take the medicine?
- What if the person misses a dose?
- What are the side effects, and what can I do about them?
- Can this medicine cause problems if taken with other medicines?



Managing medications is easier if you have a complete list of them. The list should show the name of the medicine, the doctor who prescribed it, how much the person with Alzheimer's takes, and how often. Visit [Tracking Your Medications: Worksheet](#) for a template. Keep the list in a safe place at home, and make a copy to keep in your purse or wallet. Bring it with you when you visit the person's doctor or pharmacist.

People with Alzheimer's should be monitored when they start taking a new drug. Follow the doctor's instructions and report any unusual symptoms right away. Also, let the doctor know before adding or changing any medications.

Use Medicines Safely

People with Alzheimer's disease often need help [taking their medicine](#). If the person lives alone, you may need to call and remind him or her or leave notes around the home. A pillbox allows you to put pills for each day in one place. Some pillboxes come with alarms that remind a person to take the medicine.

As Alzheimer's gets worse, you will need to keep track of the person's medicines. You also will need to make sure the person takes the medicines or give the medicines to him or her.

Some people with Alzheimer's take medicines to treat behavior problems such as restlessness, anxiety, depression, [trouble sleeping](#), and [aggression](#). Experts agree that [medicines to treat behavior problems](#) should be used only after other strategies that don't use medicine have been tried. Talk with the person's doctor about which medicines are safest and most effective. With these types of medicines, it is important to:

- Use the lowest dose possible
- Watch for side effects such as confusion and falls
- Allow the medicine a few weeks to take effect

It is recommended that people with Alzheimer's should NOT take anticholinergic drugs. These drugs are used to treat many medical problems such as sleeping problems, stomach cramps, [incontinence](#), asthma, motion sickness, and muscle spasms. Side effects, such as confusion, can be serious for a person with Alzheimer's. These drugs should NOT be given to a person with Alzheimer's disease. You might [talk with the person's doctor](#) about other options. Examples of these drugs include:

- Atrovent® (ipratropium)
- Dramamine® (dimenhydrinate)
- Diphenhydramine—includes brand names such as Benadryl® and Nytol®

Some people, especially those with [late-stage Alzheimer's](#), may have trouble swallowing pills. In this case, ask the pharmacist if the medicine can be crushed or taken in liquid form. Other ways to make sure medicines are taken safely:

- Keep all medications locked up.
- Check that the label on each prescription bottle has the drug name and dose, patient's name, dosage frequency, and expiration date.
- Call the doctor or pharmacist if you have questions about any medicine.

Medicines to Treat Alzheimer's Disease

There are five medicines available to treat Alzheimer's disease. It's important to understand that none of these medicines can cure or stop the disease. What they can do, for some people, is help slow down certain problems, such as memory loss. Slowing down memory loss can allow many people with Alzheimer's disease to be more comfortable and independent for a longer time.

Visit [How Is Alzheimer's Disease Treated?](#) for more information on medicines to treat Alzheimer's and behavior symptoms.

Medicines to Treat Other Medical Conditions

Many people with Alzheimer's disease also have other medical conditions such as [diabetes](#), [high blood pressure](#), or [heart disease](#). They may take different medicines for these conditions. It's important to [track all the medicines](#) they take and take the list with you to every visit to a doctor.

For information about paying for medications, see [Saving Money on Medicines](#).

Read about [this topic in Spanish](#). Lea sobre [este tema en español](#).

For More Information About Managing Medicines and Alzheimer's

NIA Alzheimer's and related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center

800-438-4380 (toll-free)

adear@nia.nih.gov

www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for

families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answer telephone, email, and written requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

Alzheimers.gov

www.alzheimers.gov

Explore the Alzheimers.gov portal for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.

Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116 (toll-free)

eldercarelocator@n4a.org

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

888-463-6332 (toll-free)

druginfo@fda.hhs.gov

www.fda.gov

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If you are interested in learning more about Alzheimer's & Dementia, please call us at 1-800-438-4380, Mon-Fri, 8:30 am-5:00 pm Eastern Time or send an email to adear@nia.nih.gov