

Managing Medicines For A Person Living With Alzheimer's Disease

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?
- What is the dose and how often should he or she 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 or save a picture on your phone. 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 medicines](#). 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 medicines.

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:

- Ipratropium — brand name Atrovent
- Dimenhydrinate — brand name Dramamine
- 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. Here are 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

Several prescription drugs are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to help manage symptoms in people with Alzheimer's disease. For some people, these medications may 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.

In 2021, the FDA [approved a new medication, aducanumab, through the accelerated approval pathway](#). The medication helps to reduce [amyloid deposits](#) in the brains of people with Alzheimer's but has not yet been shown to affect clinical symptoms or outcomes, such as progression of cognitive decline or dementia.



Most medicines work best for people in the early or middle stages of Alzheimer's. However, it is important to understand that none of these medicines can cure or stop Alzheimer's. 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.

We Can Help!

Alzheimer's Orange County

Call 844.373.4400

For more caregiver tips

Visit us at:
www.alzoc.org/resources

Information taken from the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health> | NIH Aug 2021 | Reviewed by AlzOC June 2022