

Alzheimer's Caregiving Tips

Managing Medicines

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.

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. 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 a new drug is started. 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 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

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 can be serious for a person with Alzheimer's. Talk with the person's doctor about other, safer drugs.

Other Safety Tips

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.

For information about medicines to treat Alzheimer's disease, see the "Alzheimer's Disease Medications Fact Sheet," www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/alzheimers-disease-medications-fact-sheet.

The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive changes.



For more caregiving tips and other resources:

- **Read** "Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease": www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease
- **Visit** www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving
- **Call** the ADEAR Center toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

