

MEMORY MEDICATIONS

FACTS

- Medications prescribed for memory loss can:
 - Ease symptoms
 - Enhance the ability to stay independent
 - Enhance the ability to engage with others and enjoy people and activities
- Current medications may slow the progression of symptoms, but at this time there are no known drugs that can stop or reverse the changes in the brain that cause memory loss. Researchers are working to find an effective treatment and cure.
- The two classes of drugs used for changes in memory are acetylcholinesterase inhibitors and NMDA receptor agonists.

ACETYLCHOLINESTERASE INHIBITORS

Drug names

- Donepezil (Aricept)
- Galantamine
- Rivastigmine (Exelon)

Action

- Acetylcholine is a chemical that lets brain cells communicate with one another, which is critical for thinking and memory.
- Impaired communication between the brain cells leads to poor memory.
- The medication can improve this, resulting in more alertness, attention, and the ability to learn and retain information.

- Think of it this way:
 - Acetylcholine is a long spiral telephone phone cord attaching two receivers.
 - The receivers on either end are brain cells.
 - Messages are sent along the phone cord between the receivers.
 - If the cord starts to fray, the receivers cannot communicate with each other, and the message is interrupted.
 - With medication, the phone cord can be kept in good shape, allowing the receivers to communicate better.

Side effects

- May go away after a few days of taking the medication
 - Nausea
 - Diarrhea
 - Vivid dreams
 - Vomiting
 - Low heart rate
- As with any medication, send a portal message or call the office regarding concerning side effects or before stopping the medication.
- Some side effects may only last a few days.
- Be sure to keep all appointments after starting a new medication. The provider will evaluate the effects and determine the best dose.

NMDA RECEPTOR AGONISTS

Drug names

- Memantine (Namenda)
- Namzaric (combination of memantine and donepezil)



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Action

- NMDA antagonists block the action of the glutamate in the brain. Glutamate is a chemical involved in the communication of one brain cell to another.
- If the NMDA receptor is failing, too much glutamate and calcium are present, interrupting communication between cells and eventually causing brain cell death.
- The medication regulates the glutamate, receptors, and calcium to improve cell communication and prevent cell death.
- Think of it this way:
 - NMDA is the front door at a fancy hotel.
 - Glutamate is the doorman, standing reliably at the door ready to welcome guests.
 - The Calcium clan arrives.
 - If there are too many doormen on duty, the door opens too often and too wide, and way too many of the Calcium clan enter the lobby. Chaos ensues in the lobby!
 - The medication acts as the manager on duty, preventing too many doormen from opening the door and letting in too many guests.

Side effects

- May go away after a few days of taking the medication
- Mild dizziness
- Headache
- As with any medication, send a portal message or call the office regarding concerning side effects or before stopping the medication.
- Some side effects may only last a few days.
- Be sure to keep all appointments after starting a medication. The provider will evaluate the effects and determine the best dose.