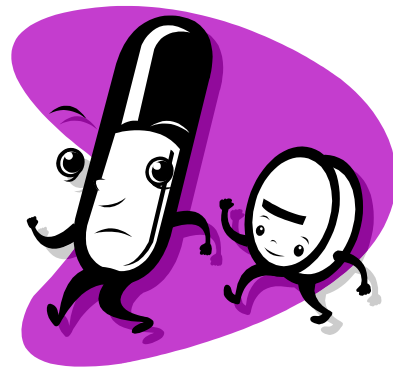


Medical Questions

Being an advocate for good care

- Useful medications
- What to expect
- When to be concerned



Common Medical Questions

1. What medications are available to help with memory loss?

- **Cholinesterase Inhibitors**

The most commonly used medications are the FDA-approved cholinesterase inhibitors (see flyer in packet). There are 3 available: Aricept, Exelon, & Razadyne. All are designed to increase levels of acetylcholine in the brain & are very similar.

It's important to remember that most families do not see a sudden improvement when their person is on one of these medications. Although this does happen on occasion, most families are hoping to slow down the progression of the disease.

Side effects are usually temporary. Changing the time someone takes the medicine to before bedtime can reduce the nausea, but check with your doctor first! Usually people stick with the one they are on unless the side effects do not lesson. You have to be careful if you switch from one to the other so that the level of the medicine remains the same in the person's system. To stop the drug completely, especially more than 3 weeks, can cause an irreversible drop in functioning if the person was benefiting.

Although they were approved to treat Alzheimer's disease, the research is showing that they may also be useful for related disorders such as Vascular Dementia, etc. There is some evidence that for Lewy Body Disease, Exelon may be more useful.

These medications are not useful for persons with Pick's Disease or Frontotemporal Lobe dementias.

Although these were approved for persons in the early to moderate stages of Alzheimer's disease, they may also continue to be helpful in the later stage.

- **Memantine**

This drug goes by the trade name of Namenda (see flyer in packet). It works differently than the cholinesterase inhibitors, by regulating the activity of glutamate in the brain.

This medication is taken with one of the other 3 listed above. Although it was released for moderate to late stage Alzheimer's disease, some families are trying it early on and for related disorders. Talk with your doctor if you want to consider this. Side effects are minimal.

2. Can some prescription or over-the-counter drugs increase confusion?

YES! Drugs that are used to treat allergies, colds, over-active bladder, and sleep problems may cause increased confusion. This is because many are anti-cholinergic, so they are lowering the acetylcholine in the brain.

Be sure to talk with the doctor before stopping a prescription drug. Also, let the doctor know of any over-the-counter drugs a person is using.

Pharmacists are a great source of information!

3. What about herbal medicines or vitamins?

Herbal doesn't mean safe! Vitamins and herbal medicines can be just as dangerous as prescription drugs. The biggest difference is that they are not approved by the FDA for effectiveness or purity.

For more information about dietary supplements, a Web site hosted by the FDA Center for Food safety and Applied Nutrition provides an overview of the regulatory framework governing supplements and answers to frequently asked questions at:

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/supplmnt.html>

Another site hosted by the FDA discusses the health claims that manufacturers can make about conventional foods and dietary supplements:

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/hclaims.html>

The Web site of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the U.S. National Institutes of Health is:

<http://nccam.nih.gov/>

4. What about pain?

It can be very challenging to assess whether someone with Alzheimer's disease is in pain or to know where the pain is (note handout). This is because of the breakdown of the messages getting through in the brain.

Pain is one of the most common causes of difficult behaviors, especially if they are new behaviors. Individuals with memory loss may not realize they are very thirsty, hungry, or in pain, e.g. from arthritis or a toothache.

Be on the lookout for urinary track infections. Signs include frequent urination and urine that is foul-smelling or cloudy. Urine should be straw-colored. If it's dark, it means the person is not getting enough fluids.

5. Can Alzheimer's affect sleep?

Sleep changes are common due to the changes in the brain. This is because Alzheimer's disease can damage the sleep center in the brain. Research has shown that many people with Alzheimer's get only 15 minutes of REM sleep over a typical 4 day period.

Over-the-counter and prescription drugs for sleep can cause increased confusion. Keeping someone more active during the day, e.g. by attending a day center, can be the most effective way to handle this problem.

6. Is depression common?

This is one of the most common problems for persons with memory loss. The chemical changes in the brain seem to often affect a person's moods. Anti-depressants can be very useful.

The caregiver also is much more susceptible to depression than someone who is not giving this level of supervision and care over a long period. Fatigue over long periods can lower a person's serotonin level in the brain which causes depression. Many caregivers find anti-depressants useful in getting back to a normal level.

7. How does this disease progress?

The main stages of Alzheimer's disease are:

- Forgetfulness / Apathy
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Dependency

Each person is different in specific symptoms and in how quickly abilities are lost. The time frame can vary from two to over twenty years. You need to prepare for the future but don't waste the present by worrying. It is best to let things unfold, seeking information and help as needed.

8. When should I call the doctor?

It is important to call the doctor when there is any sudden change in function or behavior. Changes with Alzheimer's disease are gradual; sudden changes mean an infection, small stroke, pain, etc.

Any new or increased medicine can cause serious side effects. Don't hesitate to call the doctor when this happens – even on the week-ends 😊

9. What should I expect from my doctor?

In spite of the pressure on doctors today, you deserve a:

- Quick response to your calls
- Willingness to try new approaches and/or medications
- Openness to your insights and suggestions
- Responsiveness to your loved one's questions and needs.

10. What is the research showing about risk factors and Alzheimer's disease?

Most cases of Alzheimer's disease are not directly inherited and seem to result from many different factors for each individual. One of the key areas of research is on lifestyle factors. Please note the brochure in your packet, entitled, *Maintain Your Brain*, for some of these latest research initiatives.

Age alone continues to be the greatest risk factor for all of us.

Take care of your health.
If you don't keep an eye on your health,
you won't be able to care
for the person you love.



A friend

is someone

who knows

the song

in your heart and can

sing it back

to you

when you have

forgotten the words!



Additional Information

- **Call the Alzheimer's Association Helpline for additional information on medical questions and concerns at 216-721-8457 or 800-272-3900 or go online [www: alz.org](http://www.alz.org)**

Some popular handouts include:

- ✓ **Denial**
 - ✓ **Depression and Alzheimer's Disease**
 - ✓ **Information on specific drug trials**
 - ✓ **Emergency Response Systems, e.g. Lifeline**
 - ✓ **Managing Anger and Guilt**
 - ✓ **Related disorders: Dementia with Lewy Bodies, Parkinson's Disease, Pick's Disease: Frontotemporal Lobe Dementia, Vascular Dementia**
 - ✓ **Sleep Disturbances**
 - ✓ **Stages of Alzheimer's Disease**
 - ✓ **The Doctor's Visit: Overcoming Resistance**
- **To request consumer publications or ask questions about Medicare Supplement Insurance & Medicare Options:**

The Ohio Department of Insurance at 1-800-686-1578 or 1-800-686-1526

Online at www.ohioinsurance.gov

**Elder Locator for insurance programs in your state:
1-800-677-1116**

- **Important phone numbers related to Medicare Part D (note handout in packet); have Medicare card handy as well as list of prescription drugs and preferred pharmacies when calling:**

**Ohio Senior Health Information Program (OSHIP)
1-800-686-1578**

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services: 1-800-Medicare

www.medicare.gov

Rx For Ohio

www.Rx4Ohio.org 1-877-794-6446

National Council on Aging Benefits Checkup

www.benefitscheckup.org

Golden Buckeye

www.goldenbuckeye.com 1-866-301-6446

AARP (must be a member) 1-888-687-2277

www.aarp.org/medicarerx

www.aarppharmacy.com 1-800-456-2277

Access to Benefits (ABC) Coalition

www.accesstobenefits.org/

Veteran's Administration

www.va.gov 1-877-222-8387

- **Drug companies may offer a Patient Assistance Program to help cover the costs of a medication. To see if a program is available, check the Internet, or call your physician, pharmacist or the manufacturer directly. Also ask your doctor if a generic drug is available or about free samples.**

Aricept Patient Assistance Program – Pfizer’s 1-800-226-2072 or www.pfizer.com

Exelon Patient Assistance Program – Novartis Care Plan 1-800-277-2254

**Razadyne Patient Assistance Program – Janssen Pharmaceuticals 1-800-652-6227
www.razadyne.com**

**Namenda – Forest Pharmaceuticals 1-800-851-0758
www.needymeds.com/papforms/368.com**

Today I Can

Today I can complain about my health,
Or I can celebrate being alive.

Today I can moan that it is raining,
Or be joyful at all that grows from rain.

Today I can regret all I don't have,
Or rejoice in everything I do.

Today I can mourn everything
I have lost,
Or eagerly anticipate the gift of this day.

Today I can be sad over friends
who are not there for me,
Or be happy - loving
and being loved by those who are.

I choose to have a good day, TODAY!

Adapted from, "Today I Can", by Ralph Holt

Learning Together II Leaders Manual: Family Members

Focus: Medical Questions

Supplies:

Handouts for workbooks (3-hole-punched, paper clipped to take home)

Discussion handout (copy at end)

1. *Today I Can, 9. 11.*

2. *A Friend, p 7.*

1. Welcome individuals. If there are new people, ask each person to introduce themselves (without giving a snapshot view) and mention confidentiality.
2. Note the focus for this session is on medical questions and concerns; introduce guest speaker (nurse specializing in dementia care). Note pp. 2-6 which cover the following questions and include suggested responses:
 - **What medications are available to help with memory loss?**
 - **Can some prescription or over-the-counter drugs increase confusion?**
 - **What about herbal medicines or vitamins?**
 - **What about pain?**
 - **Can Alzheimer's affect sleep?**
 - **Is depression common?**
 - **How does this disease progress?**
 - **When should I call the doctor?**
 - **What should I expect from my doctor?**
 - **What is the research showing about risk factors and Alzheimer's disease (note brochure in packet)?**

Cover one question at a time, opening to the nurse for comments and then to the group for additional suggestions or questions.

Take care of your health. If you don't keep an eye on your health, you won't be able to care for the person you love.

3. Pass out handout, *Today I Can*, p. 11.
4. Encourage families to go online or call our 24-hour Helpline for additional information (website and number in their packet).
5. End with handout, *A Friend*, p 7.

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