

A Publication of Together In This™

# Introduction to Alzheimer's Medications and "Off Label" Prescriptions

A Guide for Family

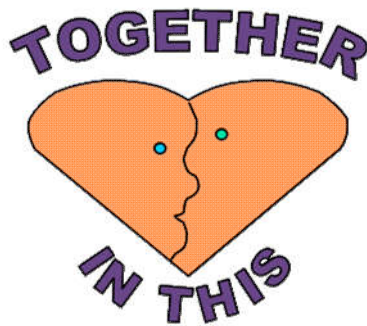
Knowledge to Empower You to Fight Back



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Empowering Caregivers

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# INTRODUCTION

We often put our trust in medical professionals to examine us and send us on our way with a prescription that fixes everything.

But for Alzheimer's and related dementias, there are no miracle prescriptions.

Medications that cure or alter the course of Alzheimer's disease don't exist.

There are a handful of drugs approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to delay the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

But there are no drugs approved by the FDA to treat dementia related behavioral symptoms.

However, doctors are allowed to issue prescriptions for off-label use.

# INTRODUCTION

Prescribing medications for a person with Alzheimer's or other dementia is a very complex challenge.

A geriatric psychiatrist is typically the best medical practitioner for prescription management.

Input from the caregiver is vital to their effort!

These doctors must identify the proper medication and dosage for dementia related issues while balancing these prescriptions with medications the person may be taking for other health issues.

This guide summarizes the approved and the off-label drugs which are often prescribed for treating dementia related symptoms.

# Approved Medications

These drugs **may** help delay or prevent symptoms from becoming worse for a limited time and **may** help control some behavioral symptoms.

Three drugs are interchangeably prescribed during the Mild to Moderate stage:

These Cholinesterase inhibitors prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine, a chemical that nerves use to communicate with each other.

Razadyne® (galantamine)

Exelon® (rivastigmine)

Aricept® (donepezil)

# Approved Medications

One drug is prescribed during the Moderate to Severe stage and may allow patients to maintain certain daily functions a little longer.

Stage of Alzheimer's: Moderate to Severe

This Memantine drug regulates glutamate, an important brain chemical. When produced in excessive amounts, glutamate may lead to brain cell death.

Namenda® (memantine)

The FDA has recently approved Namzaric® (a combination of Namenda® and Aricept®) for the treatment of moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease.

The Namzaric website clearly states, "There is no evidence that NAMZARIC prevents or slows the underlying disease process in patients with Alzheimer's disease."

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# Approved Medications

## Effectiveness and Side Effects

According to Consumer Reports, “The medications used to treat mental decline in people with Alzheimer’s disease are not particularly effective. When compared to a placebo, most people who take one will not experience a meaningful benefit.”

But many caregivers will tell you they have seen positive effects, at least for a short time.

However, others will tell you the side effects aren’t worth the use.

These side effects may include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, dizziness, confusion, headaches, constipation, fatigue, insomnia, nightmares, loss of appetite, and weight loss.



# Off-Label Medications

When a drug is prescribed for a disease it wasn't approved to treat it is considered off-label.

Although proven to be largely ineffective, these medications are still prescribed for the behavioral and psychological symptoms of Alzheimer's and other dementia.

This may include agitation, aggression, anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, hallucinations, and delusions.

These psychotropic medications include antipsychotics along with antidepressants, ADHD drugs, anti-anxiety medications, and mood stabilizers .

Psychotropics are generally approved to treat people with mental health conditions such as schizophrenia but do not have dementia.

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# Off-Label Medications

However, they are used in dementia care because they have a calming and sedative effect.

Unfortunately, this decreases the individuals quality of life. Among other side effects, they are now unable to fully engage with activities or other people.

There is a lot written about the abundance of inappropriate antipsychotic prescriptions.

And some studies suggest that more than two-thirds of all antipsychotic prescriptions are inappropriate; some say it's higher.

Your goal should always be to use these drugs as a last resort for a minimal duration, only after non-drug interventions are tried.

# Off-Label Medications

## Some Definitions:

Psychosis - a mental disorder characterized by a disconnection from reality

Antipsychotics - a class of psychiatric medication primarily used to manage psychosis, in particular schizophrenia and bipolar disorder

Antipsychotics along with antidepressants, ADHD drugs, anti-anxiety medications, and mood stabilizers are types of psychotropic drugs

Psychotropic a chemical substance that changes brain function and results in alterations in perception, mood, or consciousness

Off Label Medications are used for a purpose other than which they were approved

# Off-Label Medications

This is a small list of the drugs used:

**Antipsychotic drugs for hallucinations, delusions, aggression, agitation and uncooperativeness may include:**

- Aripiprazole (Abilify)
- Olanzapine (Zyprexa)
- Quetiapine (Seroquel)
- Risperidone (Risperdal)
- Haloperidol (Haldol)

**Antidepressant medications for low mood and irritability may include:**

- Citalopram (Celexa)
- Fluoxetine (Prozac)
- Paroxetine (Paxil)
- Sertraline (Zoloft)
- Trazodone (Desyrel)

**Anxiety-relieving drugs may include:**

- Alprazolam (Xanax)
- Buspirone (Buspar)
- Diazepam (Valium)
- Lorazepam (Ativan)

For an exhaustive list:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_psychotropic\\_medications](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_psychotropic_medications)

# Off-Label Medications

## Use and Side Effects

The lowest dosage possible should be used for a short term and should be stopped when symptoms cease.

In 2005, the FDA issued a warning that people with dementia who are on antipsychotic medications face an increased risk of sudden death 1.6 to 1.7 times greater than those who take a placebo.

These side effects may include sedation (drowsiness), parkinsonism (shaking and unsteadiness, increased risk of infections, increased risk of falls, increased risk of blood clots, increased risk of stroke, worsening of other dementia symptoms, increased risk of death.

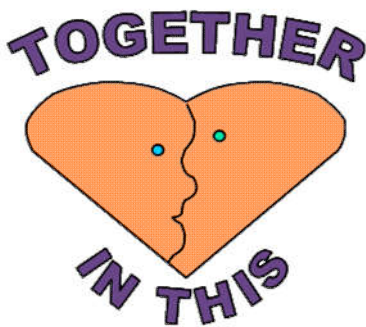
## **You are not alone**

**We are Together in This  
But nobody is going to fight this fight for you**

Having the knowledge provided in this guide will help you protect the well-being of the person with Alzheimer's or other dementia.

Please play an active role in the medication management of your loved one – their life depends on it.

Don't forget to share this guide with others.



Read this article and download the medication tracker to get started toward better medication management:

[http://togetherinthis.com/  
medication-management/](http://togetherinthis.com/medication-management/)