

Dementia Medications at a Glance

Medications available for Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias can be categorized as those that slow disease progression and those that temporarily ease some symptoms. No medications are currently available that stop or reverse the disease.

Medications That Change Disease Progression

Treatment	Mechanism of Action	Medication	Indicated For	Side Effects
Anti-Amyloid Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Anti-amyloid antibody intravenous (IV) infusion therapy that is delivered every two weeks → Can modify disease progression 	→ Lecanemab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Alzheimer's disease, including people living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or mild dementia due to Alzheimer's disease who have confirmation of elevated beta-amyloid in the brain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Infusion-related reactions, ARIA (amyloid-related imaging abnormalities), brain swelling, brain bleeds
Anti-Amyloid Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Anti-amyloid antibody intravenous (IV) infusion therapy that is delivered every four weeks → Can modify disease progression by targeting aggregated beta-amyloid plaques and facilitating their clearance from the brain 	→ Donanemab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Alzheimer's disease, including people living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or mild dementia due to Alzheimer's disease who have confirmed amyloid pathology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Infusion-related reactions, ARIA (amyloid-related imaging abnormalities), brain swelling, brain bleeds, headache, nausea

Medications That Treat Noncognitive Symptoms

Treatment	Mechanism of Action	Medication	Indicated For	Side Effects
Orexin Receptor Antagonist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Inhibits the activity of orexin, a type of neurotransmitter involved in the sleep-wake cycle 	→ Suvorexant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Insomnia; has been shown to be effective in people living with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Impaired alertness and motor coordination, worsening of depression or suicidal thinking, complex sleep behaviors, sleep paralysis, compromised respiratory function

Dementia Medications at a Glance

Atypical Antipsychotics	→ Antipsychotic drugs that target the serotonin and dopamine chemical pathways in the brain	→ Brexpiprazole	→ Agitation associated with dementia due to Alzheimer's disease	→ Weight gain, sleepiness, dizziness, common cold symptoms, and restlessness → Increased risk of death in older adults with dementia-related psychosis
--------------------------------	---	-----------------	---	---

Medications That Treat Cognitive Symptoms

Treatment	Mechanism of Action	Medication	Indicated For	Side Effects
Cholinesterase Inhibitors	→ Prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine (Acetylcholinesterase inhibitor)	→ Donepezil	→ Mild to severe dementia due to Alzheimer's	→ Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, muscle cramps, increased frequency of bowel movements
	→ Prescribed to treat symptoms related to memory, thinking, language, judgment, and other thought processes	→ Rivastigmine	→ Mild to moderate dementia due to Alzheimer's or Parkinson's	→ Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, and increased frequency of bowel movements
		→ Galantamine	→ Mild to moderate dementia due to Alzheimer's	→ Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, and increased frequency of bowel movements
Glutamate Regulators	→ Regulate the activity of glutamate in the brain to improve memory, attention, reason, language, and the ability to perform simple tasks	→ Memantine	→ Mild to severe dementia due to Alzheimer's	→ Headache, constipation, confusion and dizziness

Dementia Medications at a Glance

Cholinesterase Inhibitor + Glutamate Regulator	→ Combination of a cholinesterase inhibitor and a glutamate regulator	→ Donepezil and Memantine	→ Mild to severe dementia due to Alzheimer's	→ Headache, constipation, confusion and dizziness
---	---	---------------------------	--	---

This handout accompanies CAPC's course, **Communicating About What to Expect Throughout the Trajectory of Dementia**. Visit CAPC's online curriculum, **Best Practices in Dementia Care and Caregiver Support**, for more.

Last updated: 10/27/2025

Copyright © 2024 Center to Advance Palliative Care