Tan Tock Seng HOSPITAL

# PHARMACY

Drug Information

# Medications to Treat Dementia

## What is Dementia?

- Dementia is a condition that leads to a decline in function of the brain. Examples of functions that can be affected include the ability in judgment, language, planning and behaviour. It can affect adults of any age, but it is more likely to occur in those above 65 years old.
- Medications may help to slow the progression, but do not cure dementia.

## What are the Medications Used to Treat Dementia?

| Medication Class | Medication Name |
|---|---|
| Acetylcholinesterase inhibitor | • Donepezil (Aricept®)<br>• Rivastigmine (Exelon®)<br>• Galantamine (Reminyl®) |
| N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptor inhibitor | • Memantine (Ebixa®) |

## How do the Medications Work?

- Acetylcholinesterase inhibitor:
  - Increases the amount of brain chemical, acetylcholine
  - Improves communication between nerve cells in brain
  - Minimises and improves symptoms of dementia
- N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptor inhibitor:
  - Reduces the amount of brain chemical, glutamate
  - Protects nerve cells by slowing down cell damage
  - Enhances transmission of information and activation of nerve cells

## How are the Medications Administered / Taken?

- The medications do not work immediately. It may take weeks to months before you notice any benefit. It is therefore important that you take your medication regularly or you may not receive any benefit at all.

- You should engage help from a caregiver to monitor your drug intake if you have difficulty keeping track of your medications. Your doctor may increase the dose over time to obtain the optimal effect.

| Medication | Points to Note |
|---|---|
| Donepezil | • Take with or after food. |
| Galantamine | • Take with or after food.<br>• Swallow capsule whole. Do not open or crush the capsules. |
| Rivastigmine Capsule | • Take with or after food.<br>• Swallow capsule whole. Do not open or crush the capsules. |
| Rivastigmine Patch | • Apply once daily to clean, dry, hairless skin on the upper or lower back, upper arm or chest.<br>• Wear only one patch at a time.<br>• Do not re-apply to the exact skin location within 14 days. |
| Memantine | • Take with or without food. |

What Should I do if I Miss a Dose?

- If you miss a dose, take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose, take only the usual dose. Never take a double dosage to make up for the missed dose.

Can the Medications be Administered / Taken With Other Medications?

- It is important that you inform the doctor, pharmacist about other medications – including over-the-counter medicines, supplements and traditional/herbal remedies – that you are currently taking, as they may affect the way you benefit from medications that treat dementia.

What are the Important Side Effects?

- Medications prescribed by your doctor should be beneficial for your condition even though they may result in some inevitable side effects.

| Medication | Side Effect | Management |
|---|---|---|
| Donepezil, Galantamine, Rivastigmine, Memantine | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite | • Take after food.<br>• Improves as you get used to the medication. If side effects persist, inform your doctor. |
| | Headache, dizziness, fatigue | • Improves as you get used to the medication. If side effects persist, inform your doctor. |
| | Hallucination, insomnia | • Inform your doctor. |
| Donepezil, Galantamine, Rivastigmine | Drowsiness | • Improves as you get used to the medication. If side effects persist, inform your doctor. |
| | Slow heart rate | • Inform your doctor. |
| | Weight loss | |
| | Increase in frequency of urination | |

If you develop rashes, facial swelling or shortness of breath after taking the medication, you could be allergic to the medication. Please seek medical attention immediately.

Are There any Special Precautions That I Need to Take?

- It is important to inform your doctor if you intend to get pregnant or breastfeed while taking this medication.
- Inform your doctor if you have any heart or respiratory conditions, gastrointestinal problems (e.g. peptic ulcer disease), difficulty in urination, recovering from recent surgery, or have history of epilepsy. Your doctor may need to monitor your treatment more closely.
- Do not drive or operate machinery while on medications, as these medications may cause dizziness and drowsiness.
- If you are undergoing any surgery that requires anesthesia, please let your doctor know.

What Else can I do to Help my Condition?

- Stay mentally active by engaging in activities such as singing, playing music, art and craft, simple puzzles.
- Maintain an active social life.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Keep physically active.

How do I Store These Medications?

- Store your medication in a cool, dry place away from heat, moisture and direct sunlight.

If you have any problem with your treatment, please contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse clinician.

Please keep all medications out of reach of children.

Tan Tock Seng HOSPITAL
National Healthcare Group

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