



## MEDICINES & DEMENTIA

# Tips for good medicine management

If you have been diagnosed with dementia, good management of medicines can reduce your risk of medicine-related problems.

This fact sheet provides information about good medicine management to enable you and your family, friends and carers to actively participate in the management of your medicines.

## Medicines-related problems in people with dementia

Older people often have more than one health problem and might need a number of medicines each day to control their symptoms or treat their medical conditions. The more medicines you need, the greater your risk of experiencing side effects and medicine interactions. Using multiple medicines of different kinds also makes it more difficult to use them all correctly, and more likely that mistakes will occur.<sup>1</sup>

The way our bodies deal with medicines and the effects medicines have on us changes with age, which can increase the risk of medicine-related problems. Having many health problems at the same time, or being frail, can further increase the risk of problems with medicines.<sup>1</sup>

If you are living with dementia, you are also at high risk of medicine-related problems due to the effect of dementia on your memory and communication. You may not remember what the doctor or pharmacist said to you about your medicines, or get confused about what the medicines are for or when to take them.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, older people with dementia are particularly likely to experience medicine-related problems. As a person with dementia – or as a family or friend carer – it is vital that you practice good medicine management techniques to minimise this risk.

1. NPS MedicineWise. Older people and medicines. Sydney: NPS MedicineWise, 2013. <http://www.nps.org.au/topics/ages-life-stages/for-individuals/older-people-and-medicines> (accessed 23 December 2015).

2. Gillespie R, Harrison L and Mullan J. Managing medicines for people with dementia. 2015. <http://dementiameds.com/2015/02/24/introduction/> (accessed 23 December 2015).

## Tips for good medicine management

Good medicine management means taking the right dose of the right medicine at the right time, and avoiding inappropriate or unnecessary use of medicines. You can take steps to practice good medicine management – for yourself or a person you care for – and reduce the risk of medicine-related problems.

### ASK FOR A MEDICINES REVIEW

It is important to have your medicines reviewed regularly, especially if you are an older person taking multiple medicines.<sup>1</sup> A medicines review can help improve your treatment and prevent medicine-related problems.

On the day of the review, have all the medicines you are taking available for the doctor or pharmacist, including prescription medicines, non-prescription or over-the-counter medicines (such as paracetamol or ibuprofen), and medicines bought at the supermarket or health food store (such as vitamins or supplements).<sup>2</sup> If you have an up-to-date list of all of your medicines, show it to the doctor or pharmacist.

When your doctor or pharmacist reviews your medicines, they will gather information about all your medicines, any problems you are having with your medicines, your current health and your treatment goals.<sup>1</sup> Based on this information, your doctor or pharmacist may recommend changes to your medicines (such as stopping a medicine or changing the dose) and work with you to agree on a management plan for your medicines.<sup>1</sup> A medicines review is also a good opportunity to learn more about your medicines and ask any questions you may have.

## KEEP A LIST OF YOUR MEDICINES

An up-to-date medicines list is helpful to keep track of all the medicines you are taking and other important information such as what a medicine is for, the dose, when and how to take it, and when you started.<sup>1</sup>

A medicines list is also useful to take to appointments with doctors or other healthcare professionals such as dentists, so that everyone involved in your health care knows all the medicines you are taking. This list also provides vital information about your medicines in the case of an emergency.<sup>1</sup>

When creating a medicines list, it is important that you record all of the medicines you are using including prescription, non-prescription (over-the-counter), vitamins and minerals, herbal and natural medicines.<sup>1,2</sup> Your doctor or pharmacist can help you create your medicines list or answer any questions you may have.

There are a number of resources available to help you create a medicines list that suits your needs. NPS MedicineWise offers three types of medicines lists:<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ A paper medicines list you can fill in and carry
- ▶ A Medicines eList you can fill in on a computer and print or email
- ▶ MedicineList+ smartphone app that you can use on your phone.

Find out more at NPS MedicineWise website

- ▶ [www.nps.org.au/medicineslist](http://www.nps.org.au/medicineslist)

## How carers can help

Dementia can affect a person's memory, mood, communication and behaviour. This can make it difficult for a person with dementia to manage their medicines well on their own. Families, friends and carers can use strategies to help the person with dementia take their medicines correctly.<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ Create a routine by keeping the same medicine times every day.
- ▶ Put medicines out at the same time as meals, eg, morning medicines with breakfast.
- ▶ If the person does not want to take their medicines, do something else for a short time and then try to give the medicines again.
- ▶ If the person finds it difficult to take many medicines all together, try giving their medicines in two or more separate groups.
- ▶ If the person doesn't like the taste or look of their medicines, or has trouble swallowing medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist if the medicines can be crushed or given in a different formula, such as a liquid or skin patch.

## Questions to ask your doctor

It is important that you understand your medicines, the associated risks and benefits, and other treatment options available to you. Here are some questions to help you discuss your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist.<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Why do I need to take this medicine?
- ▶ What are the likely benefits of taking the medicine?
- ▶ Will the medicine help me achieve my treatment goals?
- ▶ What risks, such as side effects, should I be aware of?
- ▶ Will I be able to tell if the medicine is working or causing harm?
- ▶ How do I take the medicine? How long should I take it for?
- ▶ If the medicine needs to be stopped, will this be safe and easy to do?
- ▶ What would happen if I didn't take this medicine?
- ▶ What are my other treatment options?
- ▶ Which option has the best balance of benefits to risks for me?

### MORE INFORMATION

#### For more information about dementia or Alzheimer's disease:

- ▶ Alzheimer's Australia [fightdementia.org.au](http://fightdementia.org.au)
- ▶ Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS) [dbmas.org.au](http://dbmas.org.au)

#### For information about medicines in older people, including good medicine management:

- ▶ NPS MedicineWise: Older people and medicines [www.nps.org.au/topics/ages-life-stages](http://www.nps.org.au/topics/ages-life-stages)

#### For questions about medicines:

- ▶ Speak to your doctor or pharmacist
- ▶ Call NPS Medicines Line: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

#### For information about where you can get more help, as a family member, friend or carer of a person living with dementia:

- ▶ National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500
- ▶ DBMAS 24-hour helpline: 1800 699 799

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**1800 100 500**

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**1300 633 424**