



MEDICATIONS AND MEMORY

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You may have concerns about certain medications and their relationship with dementia. While it is important to discuss your individual concerns with your healthcare provider, below are some considerations when taking or starting medications such as antidepressants, antihistamines and benzodiazepines.

Antidepressants and memory

Antidepressants commonly include medications such as escitalopram (Lexapro), sertraline (Zoloft), fluoxetine (Prozac), venlafaxine (Effexor), duloxetine (Cymbalta), and many others.

Studies remain mixed on the association between antidepressants and memory. Some studies have found that these medications may have a protective effect while other have found a potential association with cognitive decline, highlighting the complicated relationship between psychiatric conditions like depression and neurological conditions like Alzheimer's and other dementias.

Some antidepressants like paroxetine (Paxil) and tricyclics are more likely to have a negative impact on memory due to side effects such as drowsiness.

Why might antidepressants be helpful for memory issues?

Depression itself has been identified as a risk factor for dementia and later in life, can represent early signs of dementia. Some studies have shown that people taking antidepressants over an extended period were less likely to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's dementia.

Additionally, depression can cause cognitive dulling or impairment that improves with treatment of depression. This form of cognitive impairment is sometimes called "pseudodementia."

Antihistaminic/anticholinergic medications and memory

Following a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, people became more concerned about a potential link between dementia and medications like diphenhydramine (Benadryl).

Medications like diphenhydramine (Benadryl) can cause side effects that acutely worsen memory, like drowsiness. Additionally, in older adults, the ability to process these medications and to produce certain neurotransmitters that help with memory (like acetylcholine) are impaired, potentially worsening the risk of these side effects

Benzodiazepines and memory

Benzodiazepines include medications such as lorazepam (Ativan), clonazepam (Klonopin), diazepam (Valium), and alprazolam (Xanax). They are often prescribed to manage symptoms of anxiety, insomnia, seizures, and muscle spasms. While they are primarily intended for short-term use, many people end up taking these medications for extended periods of time.

Studies have increasingly shown that benzodiazepines are associated with cognitive impairment, including decreased processing speed, memory, and concentration.

Antipsychotics and memory

Antipsychotics include medications such as quetiapine (Seroquel), olanzapine (Zyprexa), brexpiprazole (Rexulti), aripiprazole (Abilify), and more. Though originally created to treat symptoms of psychosis such as hallucinations and delusions, these medications are often used for other indications like sleep, anxiety, irritability, and mood disorders.

Antipsychotics can worsen or accelerate cognitive decline in certain conditions like Lewy Body Dementia and Parkinson's Disease Dementia and can also lead to severe sensitivity reactions that can be life threatening.

! FDA BLACK BOX WARNING

The FDA has issued a black box warning that antipsychotics used in elderly patients with dementia carry an increased risk of death (largely from cardiovascular events or infections) and strokes.

Other medications such as antidepressants, mood stabilizers, and acetylcholinesterase inhibitors (e.g. Donepezil) should be used first to help manage agitation, irritability, and psychosis (altered thinking) in patients with Dementia.

Talking to your provider about medications

Each time you visit one of your health care providers, tell them about any new prescription drugs, over the counter medicines, and supplements you're taking and be sure to ask if you still need to be on all your medications.

Tell your health care provider about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. These substances can have harmful interactions with certain medications and may change the way your medicines work.

Some questions you may want to ask your provider:

- 1 Why am I taking this medicine? How much medicine should I take and how often?

2 When will the medicine start working? How will I know if it's working?

3 What are the common side effects of this medication? What should I do if I experience serious side effects?

4 What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Overall, it is important to have ongoing conversations with your healthcare providers about prescription and over-the-counter medications you are taking, including your individual risks and benefits.