



Donepezil

(Pronounced don-ep-a-zil)

Why has donepezil been prescribed?

Donepezil is a drug used in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and other similar conditions. It is known as an acetylcholinesterase inhibitor.

What are the benefits of taking donepezil?

In some people donepezil improves memory and other brain functions. It can also help some people feel more alert, improve mood and motivation.

Are there any precautions with donepezil?

Donepezil is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe donepezil, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) If you have epilepsy, asthma, lung disease, a history of stomach ulcers or suffer from heart, liver or prostate trouble.
- b) If you are taking medication especially antipsychotics, antidepressants, anticonvulsants, muscle relaxants used in anaesthesia, anticholinergics, erythromycin, rifampicin, ketoconazole or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin or ibuprofen. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. St John's Wort should not be taken by patients prescribed donepezil.
- c) If you have an intolerance to lactose (this is an ingredient of donepezil tablets) but not the dispersible tablets or liquid.

What is the usual dose of donepezil?

The starting dose is usually 5mg a day. This may sometimes be increased after a month to 10mg a day. The usual dose of donepezil may be between 5mg and 10mg.

How should donepezil be taken?

Donepezil is usually taken once a day, at night. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

What form does donepezil come in?

Donepezil is available as tablets, dispersible tablets and solution. The tablets are available as 5mg and 10mg and the solution as 1mg in 1ml.

What should be done if a dose is missed?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the usual dose the following day. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber. If you take a higher dose than you are prescribed you may experience symptoms of overdose. These include sweating, drooling, vomiting, breathing problems and seizures. Contact your prescriber if you think you have taken too much.

What will happen when donepezil is first taken?

Donepezil, like many medicines, does not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some symptoms to improve. Memory and other brain functions may slowly improve over several weeks. In some people donepezil does not

improve memory but slows down the decline in brain functioning seen in Alzheimer's disease. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience some side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most important ones. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0808 100 3352 or go to www.mhra.gov.uk.

Is donepezil addictive?

Donepezil is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking donepezil should not drink alcohol. This is because alcohol may change the effects of donepezil. It can also cause confusion and cognitive impairment. Alcohol worsens the symptoms of dementia. In some people, *very small amounts* of alcohol may not be harmful, but it is probably best to avoid alcohol altogether. It pays to be very careful, because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication. Never drink alcohol and drive. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Is it OK to stop taking donepezil when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking donepezil your original symptoms are very likely to return. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will have a discussion with you and your family or carers and advise you on how long you should continue to take your tablets. You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines.

Are there any alternatives to donepezil?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although acetylcholinesterase inhibitors have the same therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are four drug treatments available for Alzheimer's disease so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological and practical therapies can also help in some types of dementia, usually alongside medication.

Summary of side effects



Nausea – Common (sometimes with vomiting)

What can be done about it?

This usually occurs when donepezil is started or the dose is increased. This should wear off within a few days. Taking the medication with food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.



Diarrhoea – Common (loose stools)

What can be done about it?

This usually occurs when donepezil is started or the dose is increased. This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.



Headache - Common

What can be done about it?

This may wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists.

| Other (less common) side effects | How common is it and what can be done about it? |
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| Insomnia or disturbed sleep | Uncommon This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. You may need to change the time that donepezil is taken. |
| Loss of appetite | Uncommon This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. |
| Dizziness | Uncommon This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. |
| Tiredness | Uncommon This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. |
| Agitation or aggression | Uncommon Tell your prescriber if this persists. |
| Muscle cramps | Uncommon Tell your prescriber if you experience any muscle cramps. |
| Abnormal dreams and nightmares | Uncommon Tell your prescriber if you experience abnormal dreams or nightmares. |
| Urinary incontinence (loss of bladder control) | Uncommon Tell your prescriber if you experience any loss of bladder control. |
| Fainting | Uncommon Tell your prescriber if you experience any fainting spells or falls. |
| Hallucinations | Uncommon |

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| | Tell your prescriber straightaway if you see or hear anything unusual or disturbing. The dose of donepezil may need to be reduced. |
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Very common = almost everyone affected

Common = many people affected

Uncommon = some people affected

Rare = few people affected

Very rare = very few or no one affected

Disclaimer

This leaflet does not replace the official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet.

For more information, visit www.slam.nhs.uk/meds or speak to a health care professional.

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