



# Prescribing Psychotropic Medication for Non-cognitive Symptoms for People with Dementia:

A guide for people with dementia and their family carers and supporters



Easy-to-Read





**This leaflet is supported by:**

- Health Service Executive
- Alzheimer Society of Ireland
- Irish College of General Practitioners
- College of Psychiatrists of Ireland
- Irish Institute of Pharmacy
- Nursing Homes Ireland
- Decision Support Service
- Irish Dementia Working Group
- Dementia Carers Campaign Network

---

**This document was proofread by:**

Ms. Geraldine Rabbitte

Mr. Paul Gallen

Independent Advocates.

---

The pictures of the medications used in this leaflet are just some of the medications available in Ireland. There may be other medications available in the future.

---



easyread.ie  
info@easyread.ie

September 2023

© European Easy-to-Read Logo: Inclusion Europe  
More information at [www.inclusion-europe.eu](http://www.inclusion-europe.eu)

## About this leaflet

---



This leaflet explains what psychotropic medications are.

This leaflet tells you when psychotropic medications might be prescribed for you as a person with dementia.

---



This leaflet tells you about the possible side effects of using these medications.

---



This leaflet tells you why you need regular reviews of the medication.

---



This leaflet tells you where you can find more information.



If you need more information  
talk to your healthcare provider.

# What are psychotropic medications?

---



Psychotropic medications are medicines that act on your brain and can change your emotions, your mood or your behavior.

---



Some psychotropic medications can help if your emotions, your behaviour and your mood changes

---



People who have dementia may have problems forgetting things, talking and doing daily tasks.

These are called cognitive symptoms.

---



The psychotropic medications mostly used for non-cognitive symptoms of dementia are **Antipsychotics** and **Benzodiazepines**.

# What are 'non-cognitive symptoms'?

---



Non-cognitive symptoms of dementia may include:

- mood changes
- personality changes
- getting annoyed
- getting angry
- walking a lot
- changes in your sexual behaviour
- sleep changes
- you may eat more or eat less
- you may have hallucinations and delusions.



If you have non-cognitive symptoms of dementia, psychotropic medications may be prescribed by your healthcare provider to help reduce these symptoms.

---

# When might I be prescribed a psychotropic medication?

---



You may be prescribed psychotropic medication by your healthcare provider if you have non-cognitive symptoms of dementia.



You will need to visit your healthcare provider to make sure that your symptoms are not for another reason.

- You may be in pain
- You may be constipated
- You may have an infection or vision or hearing problems or find it hard to sleep.



Your healthcare provider will only prescribe psychotropic medication for you if you are in severe distress

- if you might hurt yourself
- if you might hurt others
- when it is in your best interest or other ways to help you have not worked.



Your healthcare team can use other ways to help you before your healthcare provider prescribes psychotropic medication.

Other ways of helping you may include;

- Person-centred care.





- Physical exercise.



- Having more visitors.



- Support for your carers.



- Other therapies including music therapy.



- Garden therapy.

# What should happen before I am prescribed psychotropic medication?

---



Your healthcare provider will assess you to find out about your non-cognitive symptoms before you are prescribed psychotropic medications.



Your healthcare provider will also assess if you have other needs or stress which cause your non-cognitive symptoms.



A family member or carer or advocate can support you to help give information for the assessment with your healthcare provider.



Your healthcare provider and healthcare team will talk to you about trying psychotropic medications for a while.

This is called a trial.



A trial means you would be prescribed psychotropic medication then your healthcare provider would check to see how you are.

Your healthcare provider will decide if you should stay on the medication or if they should stop the medication.

---

# What are the possible side effects of psychotropic medications?

---



The side effects of psychotropic medications may include:

- Drowsiness and confusion.



- Poor balance and falls.



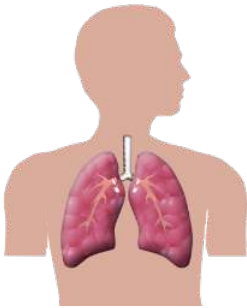
- Weight gain and diabetes.



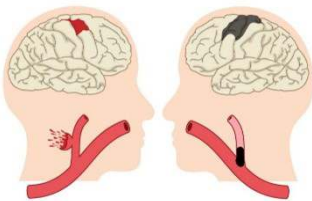
- Constipation.



- Shaking or tremors.



- Increased risk of pneumonia.



- Increased risk of stroke and dying.

This side effect may happen with antipsychotic medications.

# What are the types of psychotropic medication?

---



**Antipsychotics** are used to treat delusions and hallucinations. They are also used to treat severe aggression and agitation.

Examples of these medications are:

- Risperidone
- Olanzapine
- Quetiapine.



**Antidepressants** are used to treat depression anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder.

Examples of these medications are:

- Sertraline
- Escitalopram
- Trazodone.



**Anticonvulsants** are used to treat seizures and mood problems.

Examples of these medications are:

- Carbamazepine
- Valproate.



**Acetylcholinesterase Inhibitors** are used to help thinking.

Examples of these medications are:

- Donepezil
- Rivastigmine
- Galantamine.



**NMDA receptor antagonists** are also used to help thinking.

An example of this medication is:

- Memantine



**Benzodiazepines** are used to treat anxiety and sleeping problems.

An example of this medication is:

- Alprazolam



**Z-type medications** are used to treat sleeping problems.

An example of this medication is:

- Zopiclone



The examples of medications listed above do not include all medication names.

If you are unsure what medication you are taking or want to know more about what medication you are taking please ask your healthcare provider.

# Should I see my Healthcare Provider again if I am prescribed this medication?

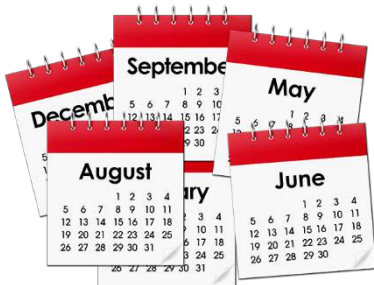
---



Yes.

When psychotropic medications are prescribed to you, your healthcare provider will arrange a review after a while to check how you are getting on.

---



Your healthcare provider will assess you regularly.

They do this to see if you still need the medication and if there are any side effects.

Some people use psychotropic medications for a long time and some do not.

---



At your medication review your healthcare provider will let you know if you need to stay on psychotropic medications and why.

---



Contact your healthcare provider immediately if you think any medication is making you unwell.



# Do I have to take these medications if they are prescribed?

---



You will be asked for your consent to take these medications if they are prescribed.

---



Your consent only applies when:

- You have the ability to decide for yourself.
- You have received enough information in a way that you can understand it. This should include information on the benefits and risks of the medication.
- You are making your own decision and are not being forced to consent by another person.



It may be helpful to have a family member or someone to support you in the treatment discussion to help you with your decision.

# Who can I ask for more information about these medications?



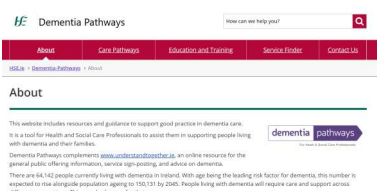
There are lots of people who can give you more information about psychotropic medications:

- Your GP or Doctor
- Specialist nurse
- Public health nurse
- Memory service
- Pharmacist



Other people you can contact are;

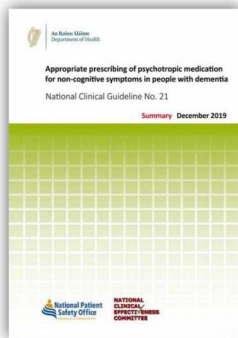
Dementia - Understand Together  
Freephone number: 1800 341 341  
Website: [www.understandtogether.ie](http://www.understandtogether.ie)



You can see information on how your healthcare provider learns more about dementia.

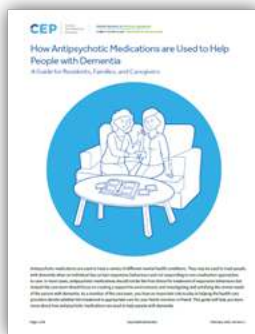
Visit [www.dementiapathways.ie](http://www.dementiapathways.ie)

# Sources of information for this leaflet



Appropriate Prescribing of Psychotropic Medication for Non-Cognitive Symptoms in People with Dementia (2019)

Department of Health, Ireland.



How Antipsychotic Medications are Used to Help People with Dementia: A Guide for Residents, Families, and Caregivers (April 2016)

Centre for Effective Practice, Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement.



Use of Antipsychotics in Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD) Discussion Guide: Long-Term Care (2016)

Centre for Effective Practice, Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement.



Treating Disruptive Behaviour in People with Dementia: Antipsychotic drugs are usually not the best choice Choosing Wisely Canada.

---

*HE*