

CARE Compass

Helping Navigate the Later Stages of Dementia



Medications for Later Stage Dementia

 Sanders-Brown
Center on Aging

This project was made possible by a generous gift.

The goal of the program is to help provide tools and information so that you can navigate the later stages of dementia. We hope that you find these videos and resources to be helpful and encouraging.

This program is designed to be a guide only for the compassionate care and support of your loved one and is not medical advice. If you have questions or concerns, always check with your doctor.

We also want to acknowledge that late-stage dementia can look very different from person to person. Sometimes the ideas we share may not work or work for a short time. That is okay. No one person is alike, and what works today may not work tomorrow. We hope to provide tools that can be options for you to try.

This guide contains links and other resources that may not be provided by the presenter but are added to the guide to provide additional information and support.

Medications for later Stage Dementia

Shifting the Focus of Care

In the later stages of Dementia, the focus for medication shifts from trying to help memory and thinking to focusing on quality of life and comfort. In the later stages of the disease, the damage to the brain is too great, so the goal is to support comfort, dignity, and quality of life. Ongoing communication with healthcare providers remains essential to ensure your loved one receives the best care possible.

Key Message

Care in late-stage Alzheimer's should meet the patient where they are physically, emotionally, and medically—while prioritizing comfort and quality of life for both the individual and their caregivers.

Compassionate, comprehensive care is still possible—right from home.

Commonly used medications

- It can be helpful to have the medications your person is taking reviewed. It might be time to re-evaluate medications for blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, or other medical conditions.
- Think about whether the medications are still helping or are the side effects reducing the quality of life or comfort of your person?
- Focus turns to medications that help with
 - comfort medications for pain like Tylenol or stronger medications if needed.
 - Agitation or anxiety
 - Sleep
 - Hallucinations/delusions
 - Aggression
- There are many non-medication approaches to address the above issues that might be encouraged before actually trying a medication

Things to be mindful of

- The ability to swallow pills may be changing as the disease progresses-
- Changing/switching medications to liquids, patches can be helpful
- Talk with a doctor or pharmacist before crushing pills to mix with food or beverage
- Always keep a line of communication open with your medical team and don't hesitate to ask questions.

Websites With More Information:

The link below should route you to the National Institute on Aging website reviewing Worksheets that are helpful when planning a doctor or medical provider visit.

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/medical-care-and-appointments/talking-your-doctor-worksheets>

Steps for Creating and Maintaining a Care Plan -A care plan is a form where you can summarize a person's health conditions, specific care needs, and current treatments.

<https://www.cdc.gov/caregiving/guidelines/index.html>

To find a Senior care pharmacist:

<https://www.ascp.com/page/findapharmacist?&hhsearchterms=%22find+and+pharmacist%22>

TIPS:

- Enroll in patient portals (Epic MyChart or Follow My Health) to communicate with providers. This can include sending a provider updates and requests (medication or appointment)
- Downloading a Pharmacy App, allowing you to order medication refills, or look up the current medication list.