

# Donepezil (doe-NEP-e-zil)

## Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

### Why have I been prescribed Donepezil?

Donepezil belongs to a group of medicines called cholinesterase inhibitors. This group of medicines is used to treat Alzheimer's disease and may also be used for other types of dementia.

People with dementia can experience memory loss and a gradual loss of skills needed to carry out normal activities. They find it difficult to recognise people or places, make judgements, concentrate and unable to perform certain tasks.



### Is Donepezil safe to take?

It is usually safe to take donepezil regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it does not suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you suffer from heart problems
- If you have stomach problems, especially ulcers
- If you have a history of seizures or fits (epilepsy)
- If you have asthma or obstructive pulmonary disease
- If you have bladder or prostate problems
- If you are planning surgery
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or wish to become pregnant

### How should I take my Donepezil?

Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it.

Follow this advice carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse. It is often best taken in the morning as donepezil may cause nightmares if taken at night. Taking it at the same time each day will give you the best effect.

The tablets should be swallowed whole, with plenty of fluid. They can be taken with or without food.

### What should I do if I forget a dose?

Never change your dose without checking with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within few hours of the usual time. Do not take a double dose to make up for forgotten doses.

## What will happen to me when I start taking my Donepezil?

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Donepezil may take a few weeks before there is an effect. You may find a temporary improvement in your ability to recognise people or places, form opinions, make judgements, concentrate and carry out daily activities such as cooking.

You may also remember things, communicate better and be more motivated. You may not notice any of these improvements but donepezil may still slow any worsening of Alzheimer's disease. Donepezil may also reduce symptoms of hallucinations, delusions or agitation associated with Alzheimer's disease.

You may experience some side effects of donepezil at the start of the treatment. They usually appear before you start experiencing any improvements. The most common effects are nausea, diarrhoea and headache.

Look at the table on the next page. It tells you what side effects you can expect from taking donepezil and what to do if you experience them. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side-effect.

## Are there any medicines that I should avoid or take care with?

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Always tell your doctor what you are taking and ask your pharmacist before you buy any "over-the-counter" medicines. Donepezil can interact with a range of medicines including some medicines that are used to relieve stomach cramps or spasms, some pain relief medicines e.g. Nurofen® and Voltaren®, medicines used to treat diarrhoea e.g. Diastop® and medicines used for treating or preventing travel sickness. Herbal products like St John's Wort and Gingko can also interact with donepezil.

If you are having surgery, the surgeon and anaesthetist need to be aware that you are taking donepezil as it can interact with the anaesthetic used in surgery. You need to tell the surgeon this in advance as you may need to stop donepezil temporarily prior to surgery.

## What about alcohol?

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It is recommended that people taking donepezil should avoid alcohol. If both are taken at the same time, drowsiness can result and lead to falls or accidents. Alcohol *should be avoided* for the first one to two months of starting donepezil. After this, if you want to drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If it does not make you feel drowsy, you can probably drink small amounts. It is worth being very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways especially when they are taking medications.

## When I feel better, can I stop taking them?

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No. Donepezil will not cure Alzheimer's disease or dementia. It helps you to maintain your quality of life. If you feel well, you still need to continue taking donepezil as any benefits gained may soon be lost once you stop taking donepezil. You and your doctor should decide together when you can stop taking donepezil. Most people take donepezil for 6 months to see if the medicine works for them. If donepezil is working well, you could be taking it for a number of years.

<b>SIDE EFFECTS</b>	<b>WHAT IS IT?</b>	<b>WHAT SHOULD I DO IF IT HAPPENS TO ME?</b>
<b>Common</b>		
Diarrhoea	Loose or frequent bowel motions	This should wear off fairly quickly. If it becomes a problem, contact your doctor.
Nausea and Vomiting	Feeling sick, throwing up and having a sore stomach	Taking each dose of medication with or after food may help. If it is bad, discuss with your doctor.
Headache	When your head is pounding and painful	You can take paracetamol for this. Discuss with your doctor if prolonged.
Insomnia or disturbed sleep	Sleeplessness or early morning waking	If you are worried, contact your doctor. Try taking your dose in the morning rather than later in the day.
<b>Uncommon</b>		
Fatigue	You feel tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting donepezil, tell your doctor.
Loss of appetite	Not feeling hungry, you may lose weight	Have small frequent meals, avoid cold or hot beverages/food, avoid spicy food and keep hydrated.
Muscle cramps	You have sudden painful muscle contractions	This should wear off with time and is not harmful. Doing stretches and massaging the affected area can help relieve these cramps
Dizziness and fainting	Feeling light headed and faint	Don't stand up too quickly. Try to sit or lie down when you feel it coming on. Don't drive and let your doctor know.
<b>Rare</b>		
Frequent Urination /Incontinence	You may find yourself urinating more frequently or have involuntary leakage of the urine.	If it is bothering, tell your doctor.
Hallucinations	You may have nightmares or hear/see things that are disturbing or unusual.	Tell your doctor immediately as a reduction in dose may be required.
Dry mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit). Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. It can also increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	To help prevent dental problems sip water regularly to moisten your mouth. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. Try sugar free chewing gum to stimulate saliva or discuss using an oral lubricant with your pharmacist or dentist.

**Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well but be careful as internet based information is not always accurate.**

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