



National
Intellectual
Disability
Memory
Service

Donepezil Factsheet

Dementia is a group of symptoms which can affect memory, thinking and behaviour severely enough to interfere with usual function or ability.

What is Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is the most common type of dementia.

AD is caused by the build-up of two proteins (Amyloid and tau) in the brain. These proteins cause damage to nerve cells within the brain, and this causes problems with thinking and behaviours.

What is Donepezil?

Donepezil (also sometimes called Aricept) is a medicine used to treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

Donepezil cannot remove the proteins which cause the damage, and it cannot mend the damaged cells. At the moment, there are no medications in Ireland which can do this.

Donepezil works by helping to increase the levels of a chemical called acetylcholine in the brain. This chemical is involved in the communication between nerve cells. People with AD have less of this chemical in the brain.

By increasing the amount of this chemical, communication between nerve cells can be improved. This can help with memory and thinking.

How will I know if it is working?

In a small number of people, Donepezil makes memory symptoms better. People may be less forgetful.

For others, Donepezil helps to keep the memory steady. These people may not notice much change after starting the medicine. The symptoms a person had before starting the Donepezil may still be present. For these people, the aim of the medicine is to slow down the progression of memory problems.

Does Donepezil work forever?

Because Donepezil doesn't affect the proteins which cause the nerve damage, the nerve damage can get worse over time. This means that for some people, memory problems can get worse even when they take Donepezil.

How do I take Donepezil?

Donepezil is a tablet that is taken once a day, usually in the evening. When you first start taking Donepezil, you take a half-dose for 6 weeks, then move to full dose. This helps the body to get used to the medicine, and helps to prevent you developing side effects.

Donepezil is also available in a liquid form.

What are the Side Effects?

Like any medication, Donepezil has some potential side effects. Most people will not get side effects.

- Stomach upset or diarrhoea (if mild, this usually settles within a week)
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, collapses
- Slow heart beat (we will check your heart rate before starting the medicine)
- Increased confusion

If you develop any of these symptoms, please stop taking the medicine, please stop taking the medicine and contact the clinic.