



Medication Management



Memory loss can affect the ability to manage medications, which can put a person's safety and independence at risk. It may be difficult to talk about medications with loved ones suffering from dementia. Therefore, we've gathered our best tips to offer assistance with medication management.

Understand

It is human nature to become defensive when one's independence is being questioned. Using the right approach is important and can create a positive outcome in medication oversight. Most people will assure that they are compliant with meds because they truly believe they are, or because they are fearful of losing their independence. Your communication must support the person's need to feel dignified and independent.

Step-by-Step ideas

- If your loved one is refusing to talk about their medications with you, try involving their doctor into the process. Call the doctor's office ahead of the appointment with your concern about the medication compliance or organization to be sure the doctor is aware. Explain that you will help ensure that their orders are followed, while also explaining any potential barriers.
- After the doctor's visit or consultation, offer to help your loved one create a list of medications with the schedule proposed by the doctor. Once the list and schedule is confirmed, make several copies for their use and keep one for yourself.
- Update this list after each appointment or upon any changes in medication or health status.

Bolster independence

It doesn't have to be all or nothing- you can bolster their independence by putting small changes in place.

- Help your loved one sign the medication bottles with a simpler explanation of the medication purpose and how/when to take them. For example, write "For diabetes, take 30 minutes before meal in the morning" or use colored markers to mark the bottle caps with different colors for morning and evening.
- Create written reminders and put them in the frequently used places/surfaces like refrigerator door, bedroom, or bathroom.
- Set alarm clock reminders on smart phones, smart watch, tablets, and computers or create a phone call reminder system using family members, friends, or caregivers.
- Introduce an easy to use system like medication organizers, such as weekly medi-set. There are many designs—choose one with an appropriate amount of compartments and one that correlates with the time of day the medications are to be taken.

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Bolster independence (continued)

- Some pharmacies offer bubble pack systems, which are a calendar based pre-packed medication sheets, but they can get confusing to people with advance dementia that no longer understand how the system works. There are also electronic automated medication dispenser systems that can be pre-filled and pre-programed for reminders.
- Also, in later stages of dementia, some people no longer remember if they took medications and might duplicate dosage during the day, it is a good idea to lock the medication bottles in a safe place or even removing them from the loved one's home

Overcoming resistance

Some people with dementia are resistant to taking medications. Understanding the reasons for this and finding ways to support emotions will be helpful.

- Try to be soft and kind when offering medication to your loved one. Do not ask them if they want to take the medication; rather, offer it to them with a glass of water and say something like "Here you go. Please, take that for your blood pressure and then we will watch a movie together." If they still refuse, take a break and offer it again in a few minutes.
- Consider taking your medications at the same time, so it feels more natural for them to be taking their medications at the same time.
- In later stages of dementia, the doctor can reduce the list of medications considering the new symptoms such as swallowing difficulties, possible resistance to medications, change in condition or reported symptoms.

Emergency planning

Think ahead and plan for a natural disaster or a medical emergency.

- Make sure that you have at least a 1-week supply of medications set aside and keep it up to date.
- Remember that some medications require refrigeration and plan accordingly.
- Keep an updated list of meds and place in a prominent location near the refrigerator.

Remember that Center for Dementia Care is ready to answer any questions that you might have about managing dementia behaviors and symptoms.

Contact Seniors At Home's Center for Dementia Care
Call 415-449-3700, email dementiacare@jfcs.org or visit seniorsathome.org