

## Donepezil (pron. don-eppy-zil)

### What is donepezil used for?

Donepezil (also known as Aricept<sup>®</sup>) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease (dementia). It is known as an anticholinesterase. Donepezil is available as plain tablets and melt-in-the-mouth tablets.

### What is the usual dose of donepezil?

The usual dose of donepezil is 5-10mg a day at breakfast.

### How should I take donepezil?

Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing. This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat. For the melt-in-the-mouth tablets, just put it on your tongue and it will dissolve quickly.

### When should I take donepezil?

Take your donepezil as directed on the medicine label. It is usually once a day at breakfast. Taking it with breakfast may help you to remember as there is no problem about taking donepezil with or after food.

### What are the alternatives to donepezil?

There are other medicines (e.g. galantamine, rivastigmine and memantine) and treatments for Alzheimer's Disease. See our "Handy chart" to help you compare the main medicines, how they work and their side effects.

### How long will donepezil take to work?

Donepezil usually starts to work in a couple of weeks or so.

### How long will I need to keep taking donepezil for?

You will probably need to take it for the rest of your life.

### Is donepezil addictive?

Donepezil is not addictive.

### Can I stop taking donepezil suddenly?

There are no known problems with stopping donepezil suddenly e.g. before surgery. However, if you stop, the benefits are then lost. There might be a rapid decline down to where you would have been without the donepezil. This may occur even days or weeks after donepezil has been stopped. When the time comes, you should stop donepezil by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks. You should discuss this fully with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

### What should I do if I forget to take a dose of donepezil?

Start again as soon as you remember if within about 12 hours. After this just take the next dose as normal. Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects. There are some special packs, boxes and devices that can be used to help you remember.

### Will donepezil affect my other medication?

Donepezil has a few interactions with other medicines.

- The effects of donepezil can sometimes be increased by ketoconazole (an antifungal) or some SSRIs (e.g. paroxetine)
- The effect of donepezil can be decreased by anticholinergics (e.g. procyclidine)
- Donepezil can increase the effect of suxamethonium (a muscle relaxant) or beta-blockers (e.g. propranolol, atenolol; used to treat fast heart rate and high blood pressure)
- There are no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and donepezil.

Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor's instructions carefully. There are many other possible drug interactions.

### Can I drink alcohol while I am taking donepezil?

If you drink alcohol while taking donepezil it may make you feel a little more sleepy. You should seek advice if you need to drive or operate machinery

### What sort of side-effects might occur if I am taking donepezil?

The table below will show you some of the main side effects you might get from donepezil.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
<b>COMMON</b> (less than about 1 in 10 people might get these)		
Headache	When your head is painful and pounding.	Try paracetamol. Ask your pharmacist if it is safe to take paracetamol with any other medicines you are taking.
Loss of appetite	Not feeling hungry. You may lose weight.	If this is a problem, contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie or sit down if you feel it coming on. A change in dose may help. Discuss this with your doctor.
Nausea and vomiting	Feeling sick and being sick.	Take the dose with or after food. If it is bad, contact your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose.
Diarrhoea	Going to the toilet more than usual. Passing loose, watery stools.	Drink plenty of water. Get advice from your pharmacist. If it lasts for more than a day, contact your doctor.
Sleep disturbances	You can't sleep very well and may have nightmares.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting donepezil, tell your doctor.
<b>RARE</b> (less than about 1 in 100 people might get these)		
Seizures	Having a fit or convulsion.	Stop taking donepezil and contact your doctor immediately.

Do not be worried by this list of side effects. Some people get no side effects at all and others may get some effects that are not listed in this table. If you think you might have a side effect to your medicine, you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you want to know more, go to our website for links to other websites with more information.

### Will I need a blood test if I am taking donepezil?

You should not need a blood test while you are taking donepezil.

### Can I drive or cycle while I am taking donepezil?

You may feel a bit sleepy at first when taking donepezil. Until this wears off, or you know how donepezil affects you, do not drive or operate machinery. You should be careful as it may slow down your reaction times.

**The small print:** This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You should also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find lots more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how it works, doses and interactions, and about the conditions. The "Handy charts" will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects.