Memory Assessment Service
Brighton & Hove

Information for people taking Donepezil (say: don-eppy-zil)

What is donepezil used for?

- Donepezil (also called Aricept®) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease (dementia)
- It is known as an anticholinesterase or an 'acetylcholinesterase inhibitor'

What is the usual dose of donepezil?

- The usual dose of donepezil is 5-10mg a day taken at the same time each day

How should I take donepezil?

- Swallow the tablets with water

When should I take donepezil?

- Donepezil is usually taken once a day at the same time each day
- If you read the information about the donepezil inside the packet it may state you should take it at night but in MAS we feel that taking the mediation in the morning is safe and often the most convenient time to take medications.
- There is no problem about taking donepezil with or after food.

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?

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

Is donepezil addictive and can I stop taking it suddenly?

- Donepezil is not addictive
- 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 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
- Discuss this fully with your prescriber, doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of donepezil at the right time?

- 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.

Will I need any blood or other tests if I am taking donepezil?

- You should not need any blood or other tests while you are taking donepezil, but we will need a pulse check at each appointment.

Will donepezil affect my other medication?

Donepezil has a few possible interactions with other medicines. The main ones include:

- The effects of donepezil can sometimes be increased by ketoconazole (an antifungal) or some SSRIs (e.g. paroxetine)
- Donepezil can increase the effect of betablockers (e.g. propranolol, atenolol; used to treat fast heart rate and high blood pressure)

The MAS clinician starting your new medication will have had the chance to discuss and review your current medications prior to starting the new drug.

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.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking donepezil?

- Until you know how donepezil affects you, do not drive or operate machinery
- You should be careful as it may slow down your reaction times.

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

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You must also see the maker's Patient Information Leaflet for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this.

- Some people get no side effects at all.
- Some side-effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days/weeks. Transient gastric side-effects are common, for example nausea, reduced appetite or loose stools, in the first week or two but should wear off completely over a few days.
- It is important to tell your GP quickly if you have an unexplained fall or frequent falls following starting on donepezil as your medication may need to be stopped.
- If you have side effects or concerns regarding donepezil you should contact your pharmacist or GP for advice. None of the clinicians in MAS work for the service every day so we are unable to respond to medication queries in a timely fashion.

COMMON (fewer 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 GP 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 GP.
Nausea and vomiting Feeling sick and being sick.	Take the dose with or after food. If it is bad, contact your GP. 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 GP.
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 GP. Sometimes changing the time of day you take your dose can help.

RARE but important (can be serious if not dealt with quickly)	
Seizures Having a fit or convulsion.	Stop taking donepezil and contact your doctor immediately.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You must also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else.