What are psychotropic medications and what are the benefits and risks of these in people with dementia?

These are drugs that act on your brain and can influence your emotions, your mood, or your behaviour. Some psychotropic medications may help cognitive or non-cognitive symptoms of dementia. All medications can cause side effects. These vary between the different types of psychotropic medications, and also vary from person to person. Side effects might include: drowsiness and confusion, poor balance and falls, weight gain and diabetes.

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Why might I be prescribed a psychotropic medication for my non-cognitive symptoms of dementia?

Your healthcare provider should explore your non-cognitive symptoms to see if they are due to dementia or another reason. For example, you may be in pain, be constipated, or have an infection or vision or hearing problems or find it hard to sleep.

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Healthcare professionals should only consider psychotropic medication when:

- other approaches have not worked
- you are in severe distress
- you are likely to hurt yourself or others
- *where possible*, its use aligns with your previously expressed wishes and preferences

It is very important for your healthcare provider to support you to try other approaches before using medication.

Have you asked for a review of your psychotropic medications prescribed for dementia?

When psychotropic medications are started, it is likely that your healthcare provider will arrange a review after a short interval to check your response. They should reassess your condition regularly to see if you still need the medication and if there are any side effects. Some patients need to use psychotropic medications long term and some do not. At a review, your healthcare provider should let you know if you need to continue the medications and why. Contact your healthcare provider immediately if you think a medication is making you unwell.

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