

ARICEPT™ AND ARICEPT™ RDT (ALSO KNOWN AS DONEPEZIL OR E2020)

The purpose of this medication:

Aricept is one of a group of drugs called “cholinesterase inhibitors” which are used to treat symptoms in people with mild to moderate and advanced Alzheimer’s disease.

In the brains of people with Alzheimer’s disease there is a progressive degeneration of nerve cells, particularly of the cells that make acetylcholine, a chemical thought to be important for learning and memory. Because of this, people with Alzheimer’s disease have lower brain levels of acetylcholine. Aricept works principally by reducing the breakdown of acetylcholine and thus increasing the amount of the chemical in the brain.

It has also been suggested, based on data from animal experiments, that the medication enhances the action of acetylcholine by making the receptors it interacts with in the brain more responsive. In the region of the brain first affected by Alzheimer’s disease, that dealing with cognition and memory, too little acetylcholine is available at the junctions between nerve cells to get messages across to the next nerve cell. The situation is helped, therefore, not only by preserving the acetylcholine from being destroyed by cholinesterase, but by making the receptors more responsive to the lower amounts of acetylcholine. Whether this effect is also true for humans is unknown.

The potential beneficial effect of Aricept could lessen as the disease progresses and when fewer cells are available to make acetylcholine.

Ongoing research is finding that combining cholinesterase inhibitors (such as Aricept, Reminyl ER or Exelon) together with memantine (a drug used to relieve the symptoms of people with moderate to advanced Alzheimer’s disease) seems to greatly improve outcomes, sometimes more than predicted from the sum of the effects of either drug alone. However, more and larger drug trials are needed to confirm these promising early results.

How does it help?

Aricept is intended to treat symptoms in people with mild, moderate and advanced Alzheimer’s disease. In clinical trials, some individuals who took the drug, compared to individuals who took a placebo (a substance which looks like the drug but has no effect), showed some improvement or no decline in cognition (including memory, orientation and language) and global functioning (for example, the performance of daily activities such as bathing, dressing and eating).

The medication may take as long as 12 weeks to begin working, and the type and length of response as well as the time it takes for patients to respond to this medication will vary from person to person.

Will this medication cure Alzheimer's disease?

Aricept is not a cure for Alzheimer's disease as it does not affect the underlying degenerative process of the disease.

Who should take this medication?

The medication is approved for people who have been diagnosed with mild, moderate and advanced Alzheimer's disease. The use of Aricept is not advised by Health Canada outside of its approved indication.

How do you obtain this medication?

Aricept can only be obtained with a prescription from a doctor after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease has been made.

A reminder:

This medication has been prescribed only for you or for the person you are caring for. Never give it to anyone else.

Important! Things to know before taking this medication:

Aricept tablets contain donepezil hydrochloride. Aricept is available in regular film-coated tablets or as rapidly disintegrating tablets (Aricpet RDT). Both of these formulations are available in 5 mg tablets (white) and 10 mg tablets (yellow).

You should tell the doctor if you are allergic to donepezil hydrochloride or piperidine derivatives such as Mycobutin (rifabutin), Ritalin (methylphenidate), Akineton (biperiden HCl), Artane (trihexyphenidyl HCl), Bupivacaine HCl, and Paxil (paroxetine HCl). You should also tell your doctor if you have a condition affecting your heart or your lungs; if you have had seizures; if you have had fainting spells; and if you have a history of peptic ulcers or have an increased risk of developing ulcers (for example, if you are taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [NSAIDs] or high doses of acetylsalicylic acid [ASA/Aspirin]). Aricept should not be used if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

How do you take this medication?

- Take only as prescribed by your doctor. Never change the dose yourself.
- Aricept should be taken once a day in the morning or the evening.
- This medication may be taken with or without food.
- Aricept tablets should be swallowed whole with water.
- Aricept RDT should be placed on the tongue and allowed to disintegrate before swallowing with water.
- If you miss taking a dose, do not worry. Take the next dose when it is due.
Do NOT take 2 doses at once.
- If you have problems remembering to take medications, it may be necessary to have someone manage this for you.
- The medication is available in a blisterpack to help remind you to take your medication every day. Ask your physician or pharmacist for more details.

What are the possible side effects?

Along with its beneficial effect, Aricept may cause some undesirable reactions. The most common side effects include nausea, diarrhea, insomnia, vomiting, muscle cramps, fatigue and loss of appetite. In clinical studies these effects were often mild, and generally went away with continued treatment. In clinical studies some people treated with the drug experienced fainting. Occasionally other behavioural effects may occur such as aggression. If you feel unwell in any other way or have any symptoms that you do not understand, or find distressing, you should contact your doctor immediately.

What to do if an overdose is taken:

If more medication has been taken than what has been prescribed, contact your doctor, hospital emergency department, or the nearest poison control centre immediately.

How do you store this medication?

- Keep this medication in a safe place, out of reach of children.
- Keep this medication in a cool dry place (between 15°C - 30°C) and avoid exposure to moisture.
- If the doctor decides to stop the treatment, return any leftover medication to your pharmacist. Keep it only if the doctor tells you to do so.
- Aricept RDT is also sensitive to light and should not be removed from blisters until immediately prior to administration.

How much does it cost and who pays for this medication?

The medication costs approximately \$5.00 a day. It is covered for the treatment of mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease under all ten provincial drug plans in Canada, provided that individuals meet specific clinical criteria for entitlement. The medication is also covered by most private insurance plans.

At the present time, this medication is not covered for the treatment of advanced Alzheimer's disease under provincial drug plans.

Who produces this medication?

Pfizer Canada Inc., 17300 Trans-Canada Highway, Kirkland, PQ H9J 2M5.

For further information:

This information sheet is a brief description and summary of information about this medication. If you have any questions about Aricept, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

The contents of this document are provided for information purposes only, and do not represent advice, an endorsement or a recommendation, with respect to any product, service or enterprise, and/or the claims and properties thereof, by the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

Alzheimer Society

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