



Our Recommendations

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. Currently, about 4.5 million people in the U.S. have the disease and that number is expected to grow substantially. People with Alzheimer's disease typically take several medicines to treat chronic illnesses. But there is a class of drugs specifically used to slow the mental decline of people with Alzheimer's. Five drugs are in this class. All are brand-name drugs that are quite costly.

To help you and your doctor evaluate these medicines, *Consumer Reports* has analyzed the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, dosing convenience, and cost. This two-page brief is a summary of a 16-page report you can access on the Internet at www.CRBESTBUYDRUGS.org. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

DO YOU NEED AN ALZHEIMER'S DRUG?

The decision to take an Alzheimer's drug is very much a judgment call. These drugs are only marginally effective for most people, but some people get more benefit than others. The drugs have short-term side effects that lead 10% to 20% of people to stop taking them. In addition, few studies have evaluated their long-term safety. We advise carefully weighing the potential benefits versus the risks before taking an Alzheimer's drug. Because the drugs are costly, you may also want to evaluate whether taking one is affordable or worth the cost.

© Consumers Union 2006

The medicines used to slow mental decline in people with Alzheimer's disease are not particularly effective. When compared to a placebo, only 10% to 20% more people taking an Alzheimer's drug seem to benefit at all.

However, there is no way as yet to predict who will respond and who will get little or no benefit. Thus, the decision to try an Alzheimer's drug is a judgment based on whether the treatment is worth the cost and the risk of side effects. Many people with Alzheimer's disease may opt to try one of the drugs for six months to a year to see if it helps. We advise close scrutiny of the patient's response by both family and physician.

Based on the evidence of their effectiveness, side effects, tolerability, flexibility of use, and cost, we have chosen the following as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* to treat Alzheimer's disease if you or a loved one has decided to try one:

- *Donepezil* (Aricept) – for people with early-stage Alzheimer's disease
- *Galantamine* (Razadyne) – for people with early-stage Alzheimer's disease
- *Memantine* (Namenda) – for people with middle-stage and late-stage Alzheimer's disease

Aricept's and Razadyne's lower risk of adverse effects and higher tolerability justify their choice. We choose Namenda because it is the only drug approved by the FDA to treat people with middle- to late-stage Alzheimer's disease. It also acts differently in the body than the other drugs and can be taken in addition to them.

The information in this brief was last updated in March 2006.

The Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

Not Alzheimer's	Early stage	Middle stage	Late stage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetting or misplacing things occasionally • Forgetting names or titles of movies or books • Some reduction in ability to recall words when speaking • Being "absent-minded" • "Spacing things out," such as appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term memory loss, usually minor. Unaware of the memory lapses • Erosion of ability to retain recently learned information • Forgetting things and unable to recall names of friends or family members • Beginnings of mental confusion • Symptoms not pronounced, may not be noticeable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term memory loss deepens; may begin to forget conversations completely, name of street where you live, names of loved ones • Mental confusion deepens; trouble thinking logically; disorientation • Some loss of self-awareness • Symptoms noticeable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe cognitive impairment and short-term memory loss • Speech impairment • May repeat conversations over and over • May not know names of spouse, children or caregivers, or what day or month it is • Very poor reasoning ability and judgment; personality changes

Cost Comparison — Alzheimer's Disease Drugs

	Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name	Frequency of Use Per Day ¹	Average Monthly Cost ²
CR BEST BUY	Donepezil tablet 5mg	Aricept	One	\$160
CR BEST BUY	Donepezil tablet 10mg	Aricept	One	\$161
CR BEST BUY	Galantamine tablet 4mg	Razadyne (Reminyl) ³	Two	\$177
CR BEST BUY	Galantamine tablet 8mg	Razadyne (Reminyl) ³	Two	\$171
CR BEST BUY	Galantamine tablet 12mg	Razadyne (Reminyl) ³	Two	\$176
CR BEST BUY	Galantamine sustained release capsule 8mg	Razadyne ER	One	\$181
CR BEST BUY	Galantamine sustained release capsule 16mg	Razadyne ER	One	\$178
CR BEST BUY	Galantamine sustained release capsule 24mg	Razadyne ER	One	\$178
CR BEST BUY	Memantine tablet 5mg	Namenda	Two	\$155
CR BEST BUY	Memantine tablet 10mg	Namenda	Two	\$148
	Rivastigmine capsule 1.5mg	Exelon	Two	\$188
	Rivastigmine capsule 3mg	Exelon	Two	\$193
	Rivastigmine capsule 4.5mg	Exelon	Two	\$191
	Rivastigmine capsule 6mg	Exelon	Two	\$189
	Tacrine capsule 10mg	Cognex	Four	\$353 ⁴
	Tacrine capsule 40mg	Cognex	Four	\$174 ⁴

- (1) Frequency of use reflects typical dosing; some products may be used more or less frequently.
- (2) Prices reflect nationwide retail average for October 2005, rounded to the nearest dollar. Information derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* based on data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health, Pharmaceutical Audit Suite.
- (3) Brand name for galantamine was changed from Reminyl to Razadyne in April 2005 in the U.S. to avoid name confusion with the diabetes drug Amaryl.
- (4) Monthly cost calculation based on less than 10 prescriptions nationwide.