

Psychotropic Drugs in Dementia Care: Tips on Risks and Best Practices

Psychotropic drugs are sometimes prescribed to manage agitation or mood changes. While they may sound helpful, many are dangerous and can actually just mask symptoms rather than address and relieve the underlying problem.

1. **Behavior = Communication.** Agitation and other behaviors often signal unmet needs. Focus on finding the cause, not just stopping the behavior.
2. **Know the Risks.** Psychotropic drugs (like antipsychotics and sedatives) can increase risk of falls, confusion, stroke, and even death in people with dementia.
3. **Handling a Crisis.** Medication may be needed temporarily in a crisis, but should always be followed by an evaluation of the cause, a plan to reduce or stop the drug, and the implementation of non-pharmacologic approaches.
4. **Watch Closely** for side effects like drowsiness, confusion, or agitation. Report concerns right away.
5. **Ask Questions.** Before starting any psychotropic drug, ask about the expected benefits, possible side effects, alternatives, and how effects will be monitored.
6. **Remember.** The individual or their designee always has the right to ask questions and/or refuse treatment.

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

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This Dementia Care Card is part of a toolkit of resources to help improve care for individuals living with dementia. For more detailed information on this topic and other useful resources, visit www.nursinghome411.org/dementia-care-in-the-community.

Visit www.NursingHome411.org for...

- Dementia care resources,
- Fact sheets on nursing home resident rights,
- Information on nursing home staffing & quality,
- Assisted living guides,
- Family empowerment resources,
- Educational webinars,
- And much more!

**All resources are free to
use and share.**

