

DEMENTIA-RELATED RESISTANCE TO MEDICATIONS (OR WHEN YOUR FAMILY MEMBER SAYS “NO” TO MEDICATIONS)



This AARP Home Alone AllianceSM video shows a family caregiver dealing with a common problem. Her mother-in-law, who has dementia, won't take her medications. Sometimes this happens every day. Linda, the family caregiver, takes an important first step by getting help. A nurse at a call center tells her about some new ways to get her mother to take the medications.

Here are some key points from their conversation:

Simplify the routine. Some medications should be given exactly as prescribed. With others you can be more flexible.

Give the most important medications first. Ask your family member's prescriber which medications are most important and which are less important. Ask if any medications could be stopped.

Try to give the medications while your family member is calm and doing something relaxing. Try to avoid activities that seem to annoy or distress your family member. For example, if she gets upset because she doesn't remember the people in a photo album, try looking at a magazine instead. If you can figure out what makes her say “no” to the medications, you can try to avoid those situations.

As a last resort, put the medication in soft food, such as yogurt or applesauce. (Reminder: Don't crush a pill or open a capsule without checking with a pharmacist.) Some family caregivers are uncomfortable with this idea because it seems disrespectful. Others think that the medication is important enough to do this. A pharmacist may be able to give you the medication in liquid form, which may be easier to take.

Remind the person that the doctor or nurse wants her to take the medication. This takes the responsibility away from you, the caregiver, and appeals to the person's desire to please the prescriber or nurse.

Additional Resources

Below are a few resources with more information.

Remember to talk to the prescriber, nurse, or pharmacist who knows your family member best before making any medication-related changes.

- > This Alzheimer's Association website has information about drug interactions and tips for making it easier to give medications: <http://www.alz.org/care/dementia-medication-drug-safety.asp>.
- > The Bright Focus Foundation website has an article called “Refusing to Take Medications: Tips for the Alzheimer's Caregiver” at <https://www.brightfocus.org/alzheimers/article/refusing-take-medications-tips-alzheimers-caregiver>.

Although written for nurses, an article called “Medication Management for People with Dementia” in the *American Journal of Nursing* has information that may help family caregivers. It's available at https://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/Fulltext/2017/05001/Medication_Management_for_People_with_Dementia.5.aspx. This article mentions the AARP Home Alone Alliance videos, including the one on dementia-related resistance to medications.

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