



Exelon (rivastigmine)

Generic name: Rivastigmine

Available strengths: 1.5 mg, 3 mg, 4.5 mg, 6 mg capsules;
2 mg/mL oral solution

Available in generic: No

Drug class: Cognitive enhancer/cholinesterase inhibitor

General Information

Exelon (rivastigmine) is a cognitive-enhancing medication for treating mild-to-moderate dementia of Alzheimer's disease. Deterioration of cognition and memory in Alzheimer's disease, and in other forms of dementia, may be associated with degeneration of **cholinergic neurons**. Exelon inhibits the **cholinesterase enzyme** that breaks down **acetylcholine**, a neurotransmitter. This increases brain acetylcholine levels, optimizing the function of intact cholinergic neurons and improving memory and overall cognitive functioning.

Dosing Information

The recommended starting dosage for Exelon is 1.5 mg twice a day (3 mg/day). The patient should receive this dosage for a minimum of 2 weeks. If it is tolerated, the dosage may be increased to 3 mg twice daily (6 mg/day). If needed, the subsequent higher dosages are 4.5 mg twice a day (9 mg/day) followed by 6 mg twice a day (12 mg/day). The dosage should be adjusted only after a minimum of 2 weeks at the lower dosage. The maximum dosage is 12 mg/day.

Common Side Effects

The most common side effects associated with Exelon are dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fatigue, loss of appetite, and weight loss. These effects are more frequent at the higher dosages, but in most cases the side effects are generally mild and transient and usually resolve after 1–3 weeks with continued therapy.

Adverse Reactions and Precautions

Patients who are undergoing surgery should let their physician know that they are taking Exelon, because it can interact with any muscle-relaxing type of anesthesia that they may receive.

Exelon may have a slowing effect on heart rate. Patients who have a history of slow heart rate (bradycardia), who are taking medications for cardiac conduction problems, or who have a history of dizziness related to cardiac problems should be monitored closely while taking Exelon.

Exelon may cause seizures in susceptible individuals, although this adverse reaction is very rare. However, seizure activity may also be a manifestation of Alzheimer's disease.

Patients with a history of asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease should be monitored closely while taking Exelon. Exelon may worsen these pulmonary diseases.

Exelon may increase gastric acid secretions. Patients who have a history of ulcers or who are taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen or naproxen, should be monitored closely for signs of gastrointestinal bleeding.

Possible Drug Interactions

Few significant drug interactions are associated with Exelon. The clinically significant drug interactions reported with Exelon are summarized in the table below.

Anticholinergic agents (e.g., Cogentin)	Anticholinergic agents and Exelon, when used in combination, may oppose each other's action, reducing their effectiveness.
Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) (e.g., aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen)	Because NSAIDs are associated with an increased risk of gastrointestinal ulcers and Exelon may increase gastric acid secretions, the combination may enhance the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding.

Patients taking Exelon should not consume alcohol because the combination may increase sedation and drowsiness. Moreover, the sedative effects of alcohol may act as a depressant, obscuring the therapeutic effects of Exelon and complicating treatment.

Overdose

Overdose with Exelon may result in a **cholinergic crisis**, resulting from high levels of acetylcholine. The symptoms of a cholinergic crisis include severe nausea, vomiting, salivation, slow heart rate, sweating, low blood pressure, muscle weakness, respiratory depression, and convulsions. Overdose with Exelon can be life threatening.

Any suspected overdose should be treated as an emergency. The person should be taken to the emergency department for observation and treatment. The prescription bottle of medication (and any other medication suspected in the overdose) should be brought as well, because the information on the prescription label can be helpful to the treating physician in determining the number of pills ingested.

