

Changes to PharmaCare Coverage for Memory Loss Medication (Cholinesterase Inhibitors)

The Alzheimer's Drug Therapy Initiative (ADTI) was started in 2007 to gather information on the effectiveness of memory loss medications. This included granting PharmaCare coverage of these drugs to British Columbians in the mild to moderate stages of Alzheimer's disease through the Special Authority process.

The ADTI has now concluded and a final decision on PharmaCare coverage has been made.

How is PharmaCare coverage changing?

For new patients: As of April 1, 2016, PharmaCare is covering donepezil for people in the mild to moderate stages of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias through the Special Authority process.

For patients who already have PharmaCare coverage of memory loss medication: Patients will continue to receive PharmaCare coverage for their current memory loss medication (donepezil, galantamine, rivastigmine, or rivastigmine patch). No changes are required.

What if I am newly diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease?

To be eligible for PharmaCare coverage of donepezil, your doctor must send a Special Authority request to PharmaCare confirming your diagnosis. Coverage starts as soon as Special Authority approval is granted, subject to your PharmaCare plan rules, including any annual deductible requirement. Coverage is not retroactive.

What if donepezil does not work for me? Can I try another memory loss medication?

Evidence suggests that there is no difference in effectiveness between the memory loss medications. If one does not work for you, it is unlikely that another one will. However, if you and your physician decide to try another one, you will be responsible for the entire cost of the medication.

What if donepezil works for me but I cannot tolerate the side effects?

Some people may experience side effects from donepezil, such as abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhea, headache, and dizziness. In the event that these symptoms persist and become too bothersome for you to continue treatment, your physician may send a Special Authority request to PharmaCare to switch you to either galantamine or rivastigmine capsules.

Why isn't the rivastigmine patch covered?

- The rivastigmine (Exelon®) patch is not an eligible PharmaCare benefit as the cost is almost five times that of other memory loss medications.
- In very exceptional cases, your prescriber may submit a Special Authority request to PharmaCare for consideration of coverage.
- If you were already receiving PharmaCare coverage for the rivastigmine patch before April 1, 2016, your coverage will continue. Coverage is not available for patients wishing to start using the rivastigmine patch after that date.

Why are these changes occurring?

PharmaCare has reviewed the results from the Alzheimer's Drug Therapy Initiative and the published research it needed to make a decision on covering these drugs.

The research suggested that there is no difference between the memory loss medications in terms of clinical benefit or side effects and they may not work for everyone. There is a substantial cost difference, however, and donepezil was selected for PharmaCare coverage as it is the least costly of the three.

Summary

- As of April 1, 2016, PharmaCare is covering donepezil for patients in the mild to moderate stages of Alzheimer's disease or related dementias.
- If you are unable to tolerate treatment with donepezil, your prescriber may submit a Special Authority request to PharmaCare for coverage of either galantamine or rivastigmine capsules.
- If you already have PharmaCare coverage for any of these medications, including the rivastigmine patch, you will continue to receive coverage.

For further information on PharmaCare coverage, please contact Health Insurance BC from the Lower Mainland at 604-683-7151 or, from the rest of B.C., toll-free at 1-800-663-7100.

Customer Service representatives are available:

- *Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (except statutory holidays)*
- *Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (except statutory holidays)*