

Memory Problems? It may be your medications!

A full medical evaluation is important when difficulties occur with short-term memory, word recall, getting lost, or completing tasks. The full medical evaluation including blood tests and brain images may uncover a treatable problem, such as a chronic infection, low thyroid or a vitamin B deficiency. Also, the doctor will look at all medicines including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, roots, skin creams, etc.

Many medicines have an "anti-memory" effect. Among such medicines are over-the-counter antihistamines to treat allergies, cold symptoms, sleep problems, or chronic nausea. Most medicines that treat urinary leaks due to bladder spasms have an anti-memory effect. Pain medicines may have a strong anti-memory effect. Many anti-psychotic medicines and older anti-depressants carry an anti-memory side-effect; however, many newer anti-depressants do not.

Anti-memory medicine may also impact body movements and increase a person's risk of falling. These medications interfere with the smooth flow of brain chemicals that send messages to the body that promote balance and stability. The ability to step over a threshold, bathtub, or bumps on a cracked sidewalk or step down from a curb, use stairs safely, change positions such as sitting down or getting up from a chair, or entering/exiting a car may be impaired by use of anti-memory medications.

What does anti-memory mean?

Anti-memory in a simpler way of saying *anti-cholinergic* or *central nervous system suppressant*. Brain

cells called *neurons* make neurotransmitters (cholinergic chemicals such as *acetylcholine*) that carry signals across cells. Acetylcholine allows brain signals to travel through the brain and control body functions. With enough acetylcholine and other important brain chemicals, we can store details, recall words to talk, read, or write, and we can do our daily activities.

The anti-memory effect may result from a prescription medicine or an over-the-counter medicine. While the medicine treats one condition such as an allergy or insomnia, the medicine also interferes with brain cell functions.

It is important to avoid anti-memory medicines whenever possible. If no other treatment is available for a health problem, the doctor and person receiving care (as well as family caregiver/significant other) should consider if the benefits of the medicine out-weigh the anti-memory side effects.

How to know whether a medicine has an anti-memory effect.

Before starting a medicine, it is essential to ask the health provider (doctor, physician assistant, nurse, etc.) as well as the pharmacist if the medicine has an anti-memory (that is, an anti-cholinergic or central nervous system) effect. Any time a person picks up prescription medicine or buys over-the-counter medicine, it is important to ask both the doctor and the pharmacist if the medicine has an anti-memory effect or other side effects, interacts with other medicines the person takes, or with any foods or liquids the person eats or drinks. Looking up the medicine on the internet and linking to sections that give special reports for doctors can reveal useful information.

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