What are the main medications for Alzheimer’s Disease?

**Early/Middle Stages**
A doctor may prescribe a Cholinesterase Inhibitor. This medication can go by the name of Donepezil, Rivastigmine, or Galantamine. The brand-names are Aricept, Exelon, or Reminyl. These medications improve memory, help the person concentrate, and help with motivation. Some people react better to one brand over another.

**Late Stages**
A doctor may prescribe an NDMA receptor antagonist. This medication goes by the name of Memantine and the brand-name is Ebixa. This medication improves thinking, calms the person, and reduces delusions. It can allow the person to function in their daily life for longer than they otherwise would.

**How do Cholinesterase Inhibitors Work?**
There are chemicals in the brain that send messages from one brain cell to another. Acetylcholine is one of these chemicals. This chemical is important for memory, motivation, and concentration. A Cholinesterase Inhibitor stops Acetylcholine from breaking down. This way, brain cells receive more messages.

Unfortunately, a person living with Alzheimer’s disease has fewer brain cells that use Acetylcholine. Medication increases Acetylcholine but the number of brain cells does not increase. This is why a Cholinesterase Inhibitor can only help with symptoms and not cure the disease.

**Side Effects:** Some people who take Cholinesterase Inhibitors report side effects. Side effects can include diarrhea, vomiting, muscle cramps, or low blood pressure. Other side effects can be sleep problems, tiredness, and decreased hunger. Some people report getting dizzy or falling. These side effects are more common when someone first takes the medication.

**How do NDMA Receptor Antagonists Work?**
Another important chemical in the brain is Glutamate. Glutamate is important for the brain to work but too much can be toxic for the brain. In Alzheimer’s disease, there is too much Glutamate in the brain.

Glutamate attaches to specific areas on brain cells called NMDA receptors. An NMDA-receptor antagonist blocks the area for a short amount of time. This means that Glutamate cannot send messages into the cell.

This medication does not address the reason for all the extra Glutamate in the brain. This is why medication will stop working at some point.

**Side Effects:** Side effects are not very common. Some people might feel a little confused, dizzy, tired, have headaches or hallucinate.

**How well do Alzheimer’s Medications work for Other types of dementia?**

**Vascular Dementia**
These medications can have a small effect. The effect is better for a person who has Alzheimer’s disease and Vascular Dementia (Mixed Dementia). The medications can help with memory, motivation, concentration, and thinking.

**Frontotemporal Dementia**
These medications are not effective for treating Frontotemporal Dementia. Some medications may even make symptoms worse.

**Dementia with Lewy Bodies**
These medications may help improve thinking and attention.