

DEMENTIA & MEDICATION REFUSAL

It can be challenging for clinicians and caregivers to convince someone with dementia to take their medicine. They may refuse medication because of confusion, fear, anger, frustration about a lack of control, and/or physical difficulties or side effects.

Solutions to Address & Avoid Medication Refusal

- Decrease confusion and distractions by creating a calm, quiet environment.
- Validate their reality and feelings.
- Say that the medication order came from a doctor (typically considered a person of authority) or someone they want to please.
 - Wearing scrubs or a lab coat can create an impression of authority, whereas civilian clothes may evoke fear or suspiciousness.
 - Printed doctor's orders or instructions to show them may help.
- Use short direct sentences and break down each step one at a time.
- Do not try to reason with them.
- Be alert to medication side effects and swallowing/taste/texture concerns.
- Find ways to make pills easier to take.
 - Try mixing with ice cream or switch to a liquid form
 - Coat pill with jelly for easier swallowing
 - Take a sip of water to moisten the mouth before taking pill



- Eliminate medications that are not necessary and start with the most important ones.
- Show/give medications one at a time so the task isn't visually overwhelming.
- Sit with the patient; don't stand over them.
- Be a medication "buddy." Take your medications (or placebos i.e.: Tic Tacs) at the same time.
- Look for things that trigger distress (ex. pill bottles may make them anxious).
- Stick to a daily routine and avoid sundowning hours.
- Offer a treat (ex. place a piece of chocolate on the table with the pill and say "first the pill then the chocolate").
- Don't force it; try again after 15 minutes, using a different approach.

