

ADHD Medicine

What medicines are used to treat ADHD?

Some medicines used to treat attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are called psychostimulants. Some of these drugs are methylphenidate (brand name: Ritalin), dextroamphetamine (brand name: Dexedrine) and pemoline (brand name: Cylert). Although these medicines have a stimulating effect in most people, they have a calming effect in children and adults with ADHD.

Although they are not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) specifically for ADHD, other types of medicine are sometimes used to treat ADHD. Some of these include clonidine (brand name: Catapres), desipramine (brand name: Norpramin), imipramine (brand name: Tofranil) and bupropion (brand name: Wellbutrin).

Do the medicines for ADHD have side effects?

All medicines can have side effects. Psychostimulants may cause a decreased appetite, a stomachache or a headache. The loss of appetite can cause weight loss in some people. This side effect seems to be more common in children. Some people have insomnia (trouble sleeping). Here are some ways to avoid side effects (like a fast heart beat, chest pain or vomiting) when taking psychostimulants:

- Use the lowest possible dose that still controls the hyperactivity. Your doctor will tell you the right dose.
- Take the medicine with food if it bothers your stomach.
- Plan to use the weekends as drug-free days. This means, don't take any ADHD medicines on Saturday and Sunday. Ask your doctor before you try this.
- Children who lose weight while taking medicine for ADHD can have extra snacks during the day, such as peanut butter and crackers, granola bars or blueberry muffins.

How should medicine for ADHD be taken?

It's important to take the medicine just the way your doctor says--not more often and not less often. Follow your doctor's advice even if you think the medicine isn't working. Be sure to talk with your doctor if you think the medicine isn't working.

It's best to take the medicine 30 to 45 minutes before a meal. Good times to take this medicine are before breakfast and before lunch. Lunch-time doses can be given at school for some children. If your child can't take this medicine at school, tell your doctor. Your doctor might suggest a long-acting form of the medicine instead. The long-acting form of this medicine should not be crushed, broken or chewed before swallowing. The long-acting forms are taken only once a day, right before breakfast.

It's also important to know that some of the medicines used to treat ADHD are called "controlled" drugs. There are special rules about the way controlled drugs can be prescribed, because these drugs could be used the wrong way. The prescriptions for controlled drugs, like methylphenidate and dextroamphetamine, must be refilled at the drug store every month. At some doctors' offices, these prescriptions are only written on 1 day of the month. You pick up your prescription on the same day of every month.

How long will this treatment last?

People with ADHD should be checked regularly by their doctors. During these check ups, the doctor will want to hear what the parents have to say about a child with ADHD. The teacher's comments about the child are also important. The doctor will want to check a person with ADHD after the medicine dose has been changed. The length of time a person takes the medicine depends on each person. Everyone is different. Some people only need a short treatment, for 1 to 2 years. Some people need treatment for years. In some people, ADHD may continue into adolescence and adulthood.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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