

ADHD Medication

Medication management of ADHD

Medication is an important part of managing ADHD because it can significantly reduce symptoms. *Medications do not “cure” ADHD but rather reduce ADHD symptoms.* In some cases, medication alone may be enough to completely control ADHD symptoms. More often, a child will require additional interventions, including school accommodations, behavioral therapy, parental training, and education and awareness about their condition.

Stimulant medications

Stimulants are the most common medications used to treat ADHD. Stimulants include *methylphenidate* and *amphetamine* medicines. They work by creating more dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain (chemicals that control body functions). Stimulants work for about 70-80% of children with ADHD and have a calming and “focusing” effect. Extended-release formulas are most commonly prescribed, but short-acting formulas are available, too. Stimulants can be given every day or only on school days, if preferred.

These drugs are considered safe and are approved for children. Lab work or other tests are not needed for monitoring. Cardiac screening is usually not needed in otherwise healthy children, although it may be recommended in certain situations. Common side effects include decreased appetite, poor weight gain, difficulty falling asleep, and irritability, although these side effects can often be addressed with your child's neurology provider. When used properly, at the right dose and by mouth, stimulants do not cause addiction. However, some children abuse them without parental and medical supervision, particularly adolescents.

- **Methylphenidates:** These are available in generic or in name brands including Concerta, Metadate CD, Methylin ER, Ritalin LA, Focalin XR, Quillivant XR (liquid), and Daytrana (patch).
- **Amphetamines:** These are available in generic or in name brands including ProCentra (liquid), Adderall XR, Dexedrine, and Vyvanse.

Nonstimulant medications

Nonstimulant medications are an alternative to stimulants. While each is different, all have been approved for treating ADHD in children. Nonstimulants are often used when a child does not tolerate stimulants or if parents prefer a nonstimulant. In some cases, nonstimulants can also be used with a stimulant (called *adjunctive therapy*) to treat ADHD. Usually, nonstimulants have to be given every day, without missing a dose.

- **Intuniv (guanfacine), Kapvay (clonidine):** These medicines are thought to act on the prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain that controls attention and impulse control. Given once or twice daily, both help most with hyperactive and impulsive behaviors. Common side effects include mood changes and sleepiness.
- **Strattera (atomoxetine):** This medicine increases norepinephrine and dopamine levels, which decreases ADHD symptoms. It is taken once daily. Common side effects include decreased appetite, mood changes, and disrupted sleep.

ADHD Medication

Supplements

- **Herbal compounds:** No herbs have been proven to reduce ADHD symptoms, although a wide range of herbal products have been touted to treat ADHD. Most are harmless, but always check with your child's primary care or neurology provider before starting your child on a new herbal medicine.
- **Caffeine:** While caffeine has been reported to briefly calm children with ADHD, it is not a recommended treatment due to risk for elevated blood pressure, headaches, irritability, and its short duration of effect.

Resources and References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/>

<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-stimulants>

[https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(09\)62182-1/pdf](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(09)62182-1/pdf)