








MEDICATIONS FOR THE TREATMENT OF ADHD

Medications prescribed for the treatment of ADHD are not a permanent cure. They produce a short-term improvement after each dose, creating a window of time in the day when concentration and impulsiveness improve.

There are five types of medication licensed for children over the age of six years:

-  methylphenidate
-  dexamfetamine
-  lisdexamfetamine
-  atomoxetine
-  guanfacine

Occasionally medications may be prescribed for children under six, but this is done rarely and only if ADHD is having a major impact on the child's ability to function. The medications are all classified as controlled drugs. This means that their availability and use are more closely controlled than most other prescription medicines.

Medications are started only after other options (behavioural strategies) have been tried and are proven to be not working. The initial dose will be low and gradually adjusted in time and as the child grows.

As with any drug therapy, there is a risk of side effects (see below). For this reason, height, weight and blood pressure readings are taken before beginning treatment and are checked throughout. If there is a family history of cardiac problems (especially irregular heartbeat) an electrocardiogram (ECG) may be requested.

Depending on the type, some medications can be taken just on school days. Others have to be taken regularly including during weekends and holidays. Sometimes the paediatrician may suggest a short 'treatment break' to see if medications are still needed.





MORE INFORMATION

Methylphenidate

Brand names: **Equasym XL / Medikinet XL / Concerta XL / Xaggitin XL / Matoride XL**

Methylphenidate belongs to a group of medicines known as stimulants. It works by increasing activity in areas of the brain which control attention and behaviour.

Methylphenidate comes in either immediate-release tablets/capsules (small doses taken 2-3 times daily), or modified-release tablets/capsules (taken once with dose released throughout the day).

Potential side effects of methylphenidate include:

- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- decreased appetite causing weight loss or poor weight gain
- sleep difficulties
- stomach aches
- headaches
- mood swings












Dexamfetamine

Brand name: **Dexadrine**

Can be used if methylphenidate is not effective. It comes in both short and long-acting forms (tablet or oral solution).

Potential side effects include:

-  decreased appetite causing poor weight gain or weight loss
-  headaches
-  drowsiness
-  dizziness
-  nausea/vomiting
-  diarrhoea
-  aggression/agitation/mood swings





Lisdexamfetamine

Brand name: **Elvanse**

Is similar to dexamfetamine and comes in capsule form, to be taken once a day.

Potential side effects include:

- 🚩 decreased appetite causing poor weight gain or weight loss
- 🚩 nausea/vomiting
- 🚩 diarrhoea
- 🚩 headaches
- 🚩 dizziness
- 🚩 drowsiness
- 🚩 aggression





Atomoxetine

Brand name: **Strattera**

Atomoxetine is different to other ADHD medications. It belongs to a class of drugs known as selective norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRI's) and is a non-stimulant. It increases the amount of a brain chemical called noradrenaline to support concentration and control impulses. Atomoxetine is taken in capsule form once or twice a day and must be taken regularly with no breaks. It can take up to three months to work, unlike other medications which go in and out of the body quickly.

Potential side effects include:

- 🚩 increased heart rate and blood pressure
- 🚩 stomach aches
- 🚩 nausea/vomiting
- 🚩 headaches
- 🚩 dizziness
- 🚩 trouble sleeping
- 🚩 irritability

Note: Atomoxetine is also rarely linked to more serious side effects including **depression** and **suicidal thoughts**. These must be reported to the paediatrician immediately with a view to stopping or changing treatment.









Guanfacine

Brand name: **Intuniv**

Guanfacine is another stimulant medication. It has the advantage of reducing blood pressure as well as improving attention symptoms. It is usually prescribed if methylphenidate and lisdexamfetamine have not worked. It is taken once a day as a tablet.

Potential side effects include:

-  tiredness or fatigue
-  headache
-  abdominal pain
-  dry mouth



Further advice

For more details about medications used to treat ADHD speak to the paediatrician or pharmacist.

Always read the information sheet which comes with the medication.

Medications for the treatment of ADHD are controlled drugs. They should be locked securely in a cabinet or safe to prevent unauthorised access at home and the keys should be kept in a safe place.

The initial prescription will be given by the paediatrician. Repeat prescriptions are obtained via the GP.

ADHD medications work best when taken with food. For this reason, breakfast is always recommended, especially as it also gives a natural boost to concentration. See **Breakfast and ADHD (A Guide)** for tips and ideas. Teenagers should avoid alcohol/drugs during treatment as these substances interact with medications and can be dangerous.