

Stimulant Medications

What are stimulants?

Stimulants are medicines used to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). They stimulate the brain by:

- increasing attention span
- decreasing impulsiveness
- keeping you awake
- making you feel full

Common side effects include:

- difficulty falling asleep
- decreased appetite

Stimulants used to treat ADHD:

- **d-methylphenidate (dexmethylphenidate)**
Brand Names:
 - Focalin, Focalin XR
- **d-amphetamine**
Brand Names:
 - Dexedrine, Dexedrine Spansules
 - ProCentra (liquid, bubblegum flavored)
 - Zenzedi
- **d- & l-amphetamine**
Brand Names:
 - Adzenys XR ODT (orange flavored), Adzenys ER (liquid, orange flavored)
 - Dyanavel XR (liquid, bubblegum flavored)
 - Evekeo
- **Lisdexamfetamine**
Brand Name:
 - Vyvanse
- **d- & l-methylphenidate**
Brand Names:
 - Aptensio XR
 - Concerta
 - Cotempla XR-ODT (grape flavored)
 - Daytrana (patch)
 - Metadate ER, Metadate CD
 - Methylin solution (liquid, grape flavored)
 - Methylphenidate chewable (grape flavored)
 - Quillavent XR (liquid, banana flavored)
 - Quillachew ER (cherry flavored)
 - Ritalin, Ritalin LA

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- **Mixed Salts of Amphetamine**

Brand Names:

- Adderall
- Adderall XR
- Mydayis

All of the stimulants listed above are effective in the treatment of ADHD. One medication is not better than another. These medications work differently in the body. Some work for 4 hours, while others are effective for up to 16 hours. If a child does not respond to one stimulant, he may respond to another.

How can stimulants help?

- Increase attention span
 - Work is easier to complete and more accurate
 - Handwriting is clear
- Decrease restlessness
- Decrease in aggressive behaviors
 - Children on stimulants are more likely to “think before they act” which may help to decrease “acting out” behaviors and aggression.

Stimulant medication may not treat all of the problems associated with ADHD. Stimulants do not make children do things they do not want to do. They do not help with math or reading if a child has a learning disability. Children with ADHD may benefit from behavioral family therapy.

Common side effects of stimulants:

- Decreased appetite
 - Common at lunchtime
 - Encourage eating a healthy breakfast
 - Encourage eating at lunch even if he does not feel hungry
- Trouble falling asleep
- Headaches
- Stomachaches

Less common side effects: (rare side effects are not included in this list):

- Irritability
- Emotional sensitivity
- Increased activity as the medication wears off
- Nervous habits
 - skin picking
 - tics: this behavior may continue when the medication is stopped
 - eye blinking
 - throat clearing

Less common side effects: (rare side effects are not included in this list) (**continued**):

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Feeling withdrawn or sad
- Decreased growth rate
- Blurred vision
- Changes in eyesight

Behavior that is unusual for your child could be a side effect of the medication. Keep a journal of your child's behavior to help your health care provider determine if this is a side effect of the medication.

Warnings about stimulants:

Let your child's doctor know if your child has any of the health care concerns listed below:

- Heart disease
- Fainting spells
- Chest pain with exercise
- Irregular heart beat
- Irregular heart rate
- Seizures
- Rheumatic fever
- History of sudden unexplained death in a family member under age 50
- Family history of heart disease
- Painful or long lasting erections

Frequently asked questions:

Q: How long does it take to find the right medication and dose?

A: Finding the right medicine and dose for your child may take several weeks. You may need to complete a checklist when your child is taking medications. Your child's teacher may need to submit information about his behavior and progress in school.

Q: Is it safe to stop the medication?

A: Discuss with your health care provider before stopping these medications. Please note that his behavior will quickly return to what it was like before starting the medication.

Q: Should my child only take his medication when in school?

A: Discuss this with your health care provider. Some children do not take their medication on weekends or over the summer. Taking medication outside of school may help with focus on homework, activities and making friends.

Q: Are there medications my child should not take when on stimulants?

A: Discuss this with your health care provider. Please note, if you give your child an over the counter nasal decongestant by mouth, it should not be given at the same time as the stimulant medication.

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Frequently asked questions (continued):

Q: Do stimulants cause drug abuse?

A: Stimulants are controlled substances. There are limits on the amount of medication a health care provider can prescribe at one time. Research suggests that treatment of children with ADHD stimulants does not cause drug abuse. It may decrease the risk of drug abuse.

Q: How long will my child need the medicine?

A: This will depend on your child's response to the medication. Treatment may last between a few years or continue into adulthood. There is no way to predict how long your child will need the medication.