

ADHD EDUCATION

DID YOU KNOW >

WHAT IS ADHD?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a psychiatric disorder characterised by the following symptoms **(1)**:

- **Inattentiveness - inability to focus, poor organisational skills, difficulty completing tasks**
- **Hyperactivity – restlessness, fidgeting or edginess**
- **Impulsiveness - speaking out of turn, acting without thinking, carelessness or recklessness**

It is most common in children and adolescents but can persist into adulthood. Not everyone will present with all of the symptoms. Some people tend to have more inattentiveness symptoms, and others tend to have more symptoms associated with hyperactivity/recklessness. Appropriate management of symptoms is essential to limit developmental disturbances, emotional, academic and/or social difficulties and the potential for long-term effects **(2)**.



ADHD MEDICATION >

WHAT IT DOES & HOW TO TAKE IT

Medication is an important part of the treatment strategy for ADHD. The drugs used to treat ADHD fall into a class called stimulants. This means that they increase the activity of the central nervous system, or in other words, they speed up the messages in the brain. This helps to increase alertness and improve mood, concentration and behaviour **(3)**. It may seem counter-intuitive to give a stimulant to someone who is already hyperactive. However, the drugs used for ADHD are responsible for increasing the amount of dopamine and norepinephrine (special brain messengers, called neurotransmitters) in the parts of the brain that need them **(4)**. These areas of the brain are responsible for decision-making, judgement and focus. Having the correct amounts of the necessary neurotransmitters in these areas allows them to function better, thereby allowing a person with ADHD to function better as well. The stimulants used for ADHD are mainly composed of the compounds called Methylphenidate and Amphetamine.

Some of the drugs for ADHD only last for a short period of time and some last for longer. Depending on which drug your doctor has prescribed, you may need to take them 2-3 times a day, or only once a day. Always ensure that you are taking your medication exactly as prescribed and try not to miss doses. In addition to improving symptoms, correct use of medication has been shown to decrease the risk of substance abuse and depression, improve academic performance and improve social functioning **(2,4)**.



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SIDE EFFECTS

Unfortunately, as with most drugs, there can be side effects. You need to be aware of what they are and how to manage them so that you can minimize their interference with treatment efficacy. Some of the potential side effects include **(4,5)**:

- **Appetite suppression and weight loss** - try not to skip meals; try eating small frequent meals rather than 3 big ones; eat high-calorie snacks in between meals; try eating dinner later at night once the effects of the medication have worn off. Record your child's weight in a logbook each month and speak to your doctor if weight loss is severe or concerning.
- **Insomnia** - try taking your medication earlier in the day so that it has worn off to some degree before bed; limit or avoid caffeine and try tuning off TVs, computers and phones an hour or two before bed.
- **Nervousness and/or irritability** - these effects may fade over time. Speak to your doctor about adjusting the dose if it is a big problem.
- **Dry mouth** - drink plenty of fluids and use lozenges to keep your mouth moist.
- **Nausea** - ensure that you take your medication with food.

Try to work with your doctor to find the optimal dose and medication strategy, rather than just stopping the medication. Remember that medication alone is not as effective as when it is combined with appropriate behavioural and lifestyle interventions. Children and adolescents with treated ADHD have a better perception of their own quality of life than those who are untreated **(2)**. This is perhaps the best outcome measure of treatment success that we could ask for.



SOURCES >

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