A Guide to ADHD Medication Options

by ALEXANDER BEIGA

Your Complete Guide to ADHD Medication

If you've been recently diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or know someone who has been – you're most likely looking for ways to treat and manage ADHD symptoms with medication.

If you are considering putting someone you love, or even yourself, on ADHD medication, this guide covers everything you could ever want to know about ADHD medication.

In this article, you will find information on:

- What types of ADHD medications are there?
- Is it best to treat ADHD medication with or without medication?
- How to treat ADHD without medication.

What Is ADHD Medication?

There are two main types of ADHD medication: stimulants and non-stimulants. Stimulant and non-stimulant medication help manage ADHD symptoms.

What Is ADHD Stimulant Medication?

For stimulant medication, there are 2 classes, methylphenidate, and amphetamine. (I'll show you how to pronounce them in a moment.)

Your body will have a preference for one over the other, which you learn through trial and error testing.

Both classes of stimulants increase dopamine in the brain. Dopamine helps you control your actions and thinking in general. As a bonus, it also makes you feel happy.

Fun fact: Anytime you feel happy, it's because dopamine levels in your brain increased.

Methylphenidate Stimulant Medications

Medications containing Methylphenidate include:

- **Ritalin.** Comes in any form you could ask for. Takes 30 minutes or so to start working and last between three and four hours.
- **Focalin.** Almost identical to Ritalin.
- **Concerta.** This is one of the longest-acting methylphenidate medications on the market, lasting eight to twelve hours. You can't chew or open Concerta. You have to swallow it, otherwise, the medication won't

work.

- **Ritalin LA and Metadate CD.** These medications come in the form of a capsule and both last six to eight hours. For kids who can't swallow pills, you can open up the capsule and sprinkle it on food (try yogurt or applesauce).
- **Aptensio XR and Focalin XR.** Both come in capsules and last eight to twelve hours. You can also break these up and mix them with food.
- **Quillivant XR.** A liquid form of methylphenidate. Perfect for people who don't like swallowing pills and tasting beads. Lasts eight to twelve hours.
- **Quillichew ER.** A chewable form of methylphenidate lasting up to eight hours.
- **Daytrana.** This type of medication is methylphenidate in a patch. You can wear for up to nine hours. It takes roughly an hour or two to start working. Lasts six to eight hours.

Amphetamine Stimulant Medications

As far as ingredients go, it's the same as Methylphenidate but more addictive and popular as a street drug. Medications containing Amphetamine include:

- **Adderall.** Comes in a tablet or capsule, lasts about four hours.
- **Evenko.** Same as Adderall, except it comes in a tablet and has a different chemical makeup.
- **Dexedrine.** Identical to Adderall, except it contains a purer form of amphetamine.
- **Adderall XR.** A version of Adderall lasting 10 to 12 hours. Comes in a capsule filled with beads.
- Vyvanse. Amphetamine mixed with a chemical called Lysine. It lasts up to 14 hours and is the longest lasting stimulant I know of.
- **Dynavel XR.** A liquid form of Amphetamine lasting 10 to 12 hours.
- **Adzenys XR-ODT.** Comes in a tablet that dissolves in your mouth. It typically lasts 10 to 12 hours.

Side Effects of Amphetamine and Methylphenidate

Reported common side effects of amphetamine and methylphenidate medication include:

- Insomnia
- Weight loss
- Disruption of growth (in children)
- Increased anxiety
- Higher heartbeat
- Increased blood pressure
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Vomiting
- Nervousness
- Dry mouth

While all types of medication carry risks, the rarer side effects of these type of medications may include addiction, heart attack, stroke, psychosis (i.e., hearing voices that aren't there), and skin rashes.

Are There Any Long-Term Side Effects of ADHD Medication?

The long-term side effects of stimulant medications on developing brains are unknown.

Increased anxiety is a noteworthy side effect. According to CHADD, Up to 50 percent of adults with ADHD also have an anxiety disorder, and should not take stimulant medication unless they want their anxiety to get worse.

Countless studies, such as the MTA study, have proven stimulants are the most effective way to treat ADHD. But up to 30 percent of all ADHDers don't see any improvement when taking stimulant medication.

When that’s the case, whatever specialist you see can prescribe a non-stimulant medication.

Next page: What are non-stimulant ADHD medications?

What Are Non-Stimulant ADHD Medications?

There are three types of non-stimulant ADHD medication: antidepressants, blood pressure medicine, and non-stimulants specifically made to treat ADHD.

Antidepressants for ADHD Treatment

Despite their name, antidepressants can help manage ADHD symptoms. They also help manage anxiety and depression, which are coexisting conditions at least one-third of ADHDers have.

While anti-depressants are not the best way to treat ADHD, they can be your next best option if you don’t respond well to stimulants.

Unlike stimulants, antidepressants have a low potential for abuse and addiction. They also don’t cause weight loss or disrupt growth. Antidepressants boost the amount of brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) in your brain essential for self-control.

List of antidepressants include Amoxapine, Desipramine (Norpramin), Doxepin, Imipramine (Tofranil), Nortriptyline (Pamelor), Protriptyline (Vivactil), Trimipramine (Surmontil), Maprotiline, and Bupropion (Wellbutrin).

Depending on your situation, taking antidepressants may not be an option in the following situations:

- You have a history or a tendency toward manic behavior or manic depression (bipolar disorder).
- You have taken an inhibitor antidepressant, like phenelzine (Nardil) or tranylcypromine (Parnate), within the last 14 days.
- Bupropion (Wellbutrin) can't be taken if you have any history of seizures or epilepsy.

Side Effects of Antidepressants

The most notable and reported common side effects of using antidepressants may include:

- Trouble peeing
- Blurred vision
- Drowsiness
- Low/high blood pressure
- Dry mouth
- Anxiety
- Headaches
- Weight gain/loss
- Sweating
- Tremors
- Stomach problems

A rare side effect of using antidepressants are heart defects.

Blood Pressure Medications Used to Treat ADHD

Stimulants are the first thing specialists will recommend if you want to treat your ADHD with medication. However, not everyone will respond well stimulants. In that case, certain blood pressure medications can be used instead.

ADHDers who take blood pressure medication appear calmer and have less severe ADHD symptoms. As of this writing, it is unknown how blood pressure medication causes this result.

Not all blood pressure medications can treat ADHD. And those you can use don't treat all symptoms like a stimulant would.

Blood pressure medications you can use to treat ADHD include:

- **Guanfacine (i.e., Intuniv, Tenex).** These medications are tablets and improve the following symptoms: Memory, Attention, Focus, and Impulsivity.
- **Clonidine (i.e., Catapres, Kapvay).** Kapvay comes in a tablet, while Catapres comes in as a patch. Both Improve the following symptoms: aggression, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and tics.

At the moment, Catapres is not approved for treatment of ADHD but is an acceptable alternative by many specialists.

As you can see, both medications improve different symptoms. The exception is they both help with hyperactivity.

Side Effects of Blood Pressure Medication

The most well-known common side effects of taking blood pressure medication may include:

- Nausea
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Constipation
- Dry mouth
- Sinus congestion
- Higher heartbeat
- Blurry vision

The rarer side effects of taking blood pressure medication may include a higher heartbeat and/or low blood pressure.

There have been "some" (the exact number isn't out yet) deaths in children who took blood pressure medication with stimulants. It's "unknown" whether the deaths are from taking both medications at the same time. The risk is there though.

You should not take blood pressure medication if your family has a history of low blood pressure or heart problems.

Next page: Strattera, a non-stimulant ADHD medication option. And is there a difference between adult and children ADHD medications?

Strattera: The Only Non-Stimulant Made Specifically to Treat ADHD

Strattera is the only non-stimulant medication made only for treating ADHD. It's also the first non-stimulant approved by the FDA for treatment of ADHD in children and adults.

It works differently than stimulant medications. Stimulants slow the absorption or increase the amount of dopamine in the brain.

Strattera instead blocks the absorption of a chemical called norepinephrine. It uses a different method to achieve

the same results as stimulant medication.

While the effects of stimulants can be felt the day you take them, it takes Strattera two to four weeks to start working. Once it does, you should notice an increase in concentration along with a decrease in hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Other benefits of Strattera include:

- **24-hour symptom control.** The most potent stimulants (as shown above) last up to 12 hours. Since Strattera last 24 hours, you don't have to worry about planning your evenings based on when your medication will wear off.
- **No potential for abuse or addiction.** There is no boost of dopamine in the brain, Strattera cannot be abused to provide any pleasure. (As I said earlier, dopamine is a brain chemical that makes you feel happy.)
- **No increase in tics.** Strattera doesn't boost dopamine, and it won't give you more motor or vocal tics. If you're an ADHDer with Tourette's, this is likely your best option.
- **Helps treat ADHD, depression, and anxiety all at once. A recent study, published in the *National Institutes of Health*, showed Strattera reduced depression, anxiety and ADHD at the same time. This means you can take one medication to treat all three of these conditions if you have them.**

Side Effects of Strattera

For all the good Strattera does, it has the most side effects out of all your options. Reported common side effects of Strattera include:

- Stomach pain
- Increased irritability
- Anxiety
- Constipation
- Decreased appetite
- Lower libido (Erectile dysfunction, loss of interest in sex, and trouble achieving orgasm)
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Nausea
- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Blurry vision, double vision, and enlarged pupils
- Vomiting
- Weight loss
- Increased menstrual cramps

The rare side effects of using Strattera may include trouble urinating, high or irregular heartbeat, fainting, numbness or tingling, or thoughts of suicide.

Don't take Strattera if you have high blood pressure, liver disease and/or a history of depression.

Is There a Difference Between ADHD Medications for Adults vs Children?

No. An adult may need a higher dosage than a child, though not always.

Most studies for ADHD medication are done in children. But medication works regardless of your age in most

cases. An exception would be with side effects, such as Strattera's potential to cause menstrual cramps in women, and erectile dysfunction in men.

An adult may need a higher dosage than a child, though not always. One thing we don't know is how ADHD medication affects the brain long-term.

For this reason, it's presumably safer to take ADHD medications as an adult than as a child. Children's developing brains are more vulnerable than a matured adult brain.

Next page: Are ADHD medications safe? And how to treat ADHD without medication.

Are ADHD Medications Safe?

Generally taking ADHD medications are safe, but there are four things to keep in mind about them:

1. They come with side effects, of which you are likely to experience a few.
2. ADHD medications are not always guaranteed to work.
3. They can harm you if you don't take them correctly.
4. When they do work, they are considered the most effective treatment method.

It's important to know that the benefit of taking ADHD medication outweighs the risk for most people.

How to Treat ADHD Without Medication

There's nothing wrong with taking medication to treat ADHD. All it does is increase the amount of chemicals (neurotransmitters) you need in your brain. Everyone relies on these same chemicals to function every day.

As for me, I think medication is a band-aid. I prefer to solve my own problems rather than rely on medication. If you feel the same way, you will enjoy reading this section.

Even if you want to take ADHD medication, you should still read what's below. ADHD medication alone is not the correct way to treat ADHD.

1. Be Active Outside for at Least 20 Minutes Every Day

A study, published in *Wiley Online Library*, showed ADHDers who go out in nature for at least 20 minutes every day had reduced ADHD symptoms.

It has something to do with the fact that humans originated from nature, which is where we feel most comfortable. Especially as children.

Besides burning calories and keeping your body fit, exercise causes your brain to release endorphins. These make you feel good.

So if you don't want to go outside, at least exercise. It will help you become healthier, which is something ADHD medication can't do.

2. Therapy

Therapy is the most common way to treat ADHD with or without medication. Medication doesn't teach skills and coping mechanisms. Therapy does.

Children and adults with ADHD can both benefit from behavioral therapy. As someone who was an ADHD child, I can honestly say raising an ADHD child is a different challenge than what you expect. If both parents aren't in the

child's life, it becomes even more challenging.

For adult ADHDers, behavioral therapy can help you develop coping skills you may not have learned on your own. If you're lucky, your parents will be ADHD aware so they can take the unique approach necessary to develop coping skills in childhood.

Parental therapy is just like the name suggest. It's therapy for parents to help them deal with the frustrations of raising an ADHDer. It also teaches parents (who may have ADHD themselves) skills to help them raise an ADHD child.

3. Eat a Healthy Diet

Having a healthy diet isn't as hard as you think it might be.

For ADHD in particular, having a healthy ADHD-friendly diet will help your brain function better. Think of your ADHD brain as a brain operating, not exactly in a negative way, but in a way that makes your life difficult in certain instances.

Having a healthy diet is as simple as avoiding processed foods, fast food, foods with coloring and other additives, and junk foods. Likewise, you should consume more water, fiber, whole grains, veggies, and fruits.

4. Use a To-Do List to Create Structure in Your Life

As humans, we crave structure. We rely on rules and law. ADHDers lack structure.

It's because our executive function isn't as "on point" as it should be. Executive function is your ability to dictate task and manage your thoughts.

If you ever noticed how you take more time to do "easy" stuff than other people (like a shower) it's because of your executive function. Not to mention, having ADHD almost makes you a non-conformist by default.

If you want to give yourself structure, you can either go to jail or take out a piece of paper and write down your to-do list. Both options will give you lots of structure!

Jails give you structure because you have to wake up at a certain time, eat at a certain time, every day. Jails create routine, and routines give structure.

A to-do list isn't as extreme, but it can be just as effective in getting you into a routine so you can do what you need to do.

Seriously, a to-do list can change your life. It's a form of accountability by you and for you. It will help you get more done, whether it's work or something else.