

[Return to Web version](#)

## ADHD Medicines

### What medicines are used to treat ADHD?

Some medicines used to treat attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are called psychostimulants. Some of these drugs include methylphenidate, dextroamphetamine and d- and l-amphetamine racemic mixture. Although these medicines have a stimulating effect in most people, they have a calming effect in people who have ADHD.

Other medicines sometimes used to treat ADHD include atomoxetine, clonidine, desipramine, imipramine and bupropion.

It's important to know that psychostimulant medicines used to treat ADHD are called "controlled" drugs. There are special rules about the way controlled drugs can be prescribed. The prescriptions for controlled drugs, such as methylphenidate and dextroamphetamine, must be refilled at the drug store every month.

[Return to top](#)

### Do the medicines for ADHD have side effects?

All medicines have side effects. Psychostimulants may decrease your appetite and cause a stomachache or a headache. The loss of appetite can cause weight loss in some people. This side effect seems to be more common in children. Some people have insomnia (trouble sleeping). Other possible side effects include fast heart beat, chest pain or vomiting. Here are some ways to avoid side effects when taking psychostimulants:

- Use the lowest possible dose that still controls the hyperactivity. Your doctor will tell you the right dose.
- Take the medicine with food if it bothers your stomach.
- Ask your doctor if you can skip the medicines on the weekends. This means that you don't take any ADHD medicines on Saturday and Sunday.
- Offer healthy snacks to children who lose weight while taking medicine for ADHD.

[Return to top](#)

### How should medicine for ADHD be taken?

It's important to take the medicine just the way your doctor prescribes it. Follow your doctor's advice even if you think the medicine isn't working. Be sure to talk with your doctor if you think the medicine isn't working.

It's best to take the medicine 30 to 45 minutes before a meal. Good times to take this medicine are before breakfast and before lunch (if a second dose is needed). Lunch-time doses can be given at school for some children. If your child can't take this medicine at school, tell your doctor. Your doctor

might suggest a long-acting form of the medicine instead. The long-acting form of this medicine is taken once a day only, right before breakfast. If you are taking the long-acting form of this medicine, do not crush, break or chew it before swallowing it.

[Return to top](#)

## Will the medicines also help with other problems?

The medicines used to treat ADHD have been shown to improve a person's ability to do specific tasks, such as pay attention or have more self-control in certain situations. It is not known whether these medicines can improve broader aspects of life, such as relationships or learning and reading skills. However, when children who have ADHD are not achieving their potential in school, medical treatment can often result in better grades and behavior.

[Return to top](#)

## How long will this treatment last?

The length of time a person takes medicine for ADHD depends on each person. Everyone is different. Some people only need to take medicine for 1 to 2 years, while others need treatment for many more years. In some people, ADHD may continue into adolescence and adulthood.

People who have ADHD should be checked regularly by their doctors. During these checkups, the doctor will want to hear what the parents have to say about a child who has ADHD. A teacher's comments about the child are also important. If your child has ADHD, your doctor may suggest that he or she take a break from his or her medicines once in a while to see if the medicine is still necessary. Talk with your doctor about the best time to do this--school breaks or summer vacation might be best.

[Return to top](#)

## Source

[Written by familydoctor.org editorial staff.](#)

American Academy of Family Physicians

Reviewed/Updated: 09/10

Created: 04/97

[Copyright](#) © 1997-2011 [American Academy of Family Physicians](#)

[Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)  
[About This Site](#) | [What's New](#) | [Advertising Policy](#)