

MEDICATIONS TO TREAT ADHD



Pharmacotherapy should always be used together with psychosocial and educational support.

Both psychostimulant and nonstimulant drugs alter catecholaminergic neurotransmission, which has been identified as being low in individuals with ADHD.

Medications Used to Treat ADHD

Medication class	Drug examples	Mechanism of action
Stimulants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dextroamphetamine sulfate (Dexedrine) Methamphetamine (Methedrine) Lisdexamfetamine (Vyvanse) Methylphenidate (Ritalin) Dexmethylphenidate (Focalin) 	Increase dopamine levels, which boosts concentration and lessens impulsive hyperactive behaviors
Norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors	Atomoxetine (Strattera)	Block the presynaptic norepinephrine transporter (NET) in the brain and inhibit serotonin reuptake by binding to the selective serotonin transporter
(only for clients > 6 years old)		
Alpha agonists (work best in combination with a stimulant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clonidine (Catapres) Guanfacine (Tenex) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen norepinephrine signals in the prefrontal cortex Decrease impulsivity and insomnia, increase emotional regulation

Common Side Effects of ADHD Medications



Side effects are typically mild and resolve after first few weeks of use.

Client Education

The stimulant class of medication works for 70–80% of children with ADHD.

Should I only give my child medication while they are at school? Should they take a break on the weekend?

Dosage is not based on gender, age, or severity of impairment, but on the rate at which the medication is metabolized and how efficiently it is absorbed by the body.

No, clients should take medications consistently. Only treating children while they are at school sets them up for social difficulties outside of school.

Children with untreated ADHD are more likely to have difficulty in school, become depressed, or have accidents.

Three signs dosage or medication needs adjustment:

- Little improvement in ADHD symptoms or diminishing symptom control over time
- Feeling “revved up” or “slowed down”
- Experiencing side effects

Signs the medication is working: Sustained focus, improved mood, greater attention to details, better memory, better sleep, reduced impulsivity

NOTES

