

## Medicines for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children

**What do ADHD medicines do?** — These medicines help children with ADHD pay attention and concentrate better. The most common medicines to treat ADHD are called "stimulants." Stimulants do not cause children to be more active or excited. Instead, these medicines help different parts of the brain to work together.

**Does my child need medicines for ADHD?** — Some parents wonder whether their child needs medicine for ADHD. It is something that all parents need to discuss with their child's doctor. But it's important to know that many studies show that ADHD medicines are very good at helping children to pay attention and concentrate better.

**Medicines to treat ADHD** — There are 2 main kinds of medicines to treat ADHD: stimulants and nonstimulants. Stimulants work faster and cost less than nonstimulants. But some children get side effect from stimulants, so they cannot take them. Plus, children with certain medical problems should not take stimulants. Your doctor or nurse will work with you to choose the safest medicine for your child.

- **Methylphenidate (sample brand names: Ritalin, Methylin)** - These are stimulant medicines and are given as a tablet, capsule, or liquid. They come in different formulas that work on the body in different ways. Short-acting formulas are usually started with 1 dose per day. They later go up to 2 doses per day. Long-acting formulas are usually taken once per day. A child can also get a methylphenidate patch (brand name: Daytrana). The child wears the patch on the skin for up to 9 hours per day.

- **Amphetamines (sample brand names: Dexedrine, Adderall, Vyvanse)** - These are different types of stimulant medicines that also come in short-acting and long-acting formulas.

- **Atomoxetine (brand name: Strattera)** – This is a non-stimulant medicine that a child can take if he or she should not take stimulants. Atomoxetine comes as a capsule that is usually taken once or twice per day.

**How soon will I notice a change in my child's behavior?** — The immediate-release stimulants usually start to work in 30 to 40 minutes. But doctors often start children on a low dose, which might be too small to make a difference in your child's behavior. Your child's nurse or doctor will tell you if you should give your child a higher dose.

If your child takes [atomoxetine](#), it will probably take at least 1 week before you notice changes in your child's behavior.

**What if my child needs to take ADHD medicine at school?** — If your child needs to take medicine at school, you should give your child's school nurse or faculty member a separate bottle of your child's medicine. That way, the person can give your child a dose at the right time. Do not let your child keep the medicine in his or her school bag or desk.

**What if my child has have side effects?** — Some of the most common side effects include:

- Not feeling hungry
- Trouble sleeping
- Weight loss
- Motor tics – These are unusual movements that a child cannot control, such as blinking, shrugging the shoulders, or jerking the head.

Most of these side effects are mild and go away after a few weeks. Some can be avoided by changing the way the medicine is given. Rarely, ADHD medicines can have more serious side



effects. Your child's doctor or nurse will discuss these with you before your child starts the medicine.

**This topic retrieved from UpToDate on:** Dec 09, 2015.

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Topic 85728 Version 6.0