



ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)

A handy chart to help you compare the medicines to help the symptoms of ADHD

Please note: You are unique and this is only a guide!

Some people may get better with a medicine but some may stay the same. Some may improve quicker than others. Some may get all the side effects in the book, others none at all. What happens to you will depend on your unique brain and your genes. However, this guide should help you to start to be able to choose between the medicines. There are many other ways you can be helped.

No guide can be 100% unbiased, but we have tried to stick to the facts about medicines. We hope you take this guide in the way in which it is intended i.e. an honest attempt to inform, educate and help.

What the sections in the table mean:

Medicine – these are the main medicines to help treat the symptoms of ADHD, and a few others that are sometimes used.

- We have listed them by their “generic name” (the name of the actual medicine). We have also mentioned the trade name where possible. The XL tablets and capsules are different from each other, and not interchangeable.
- Not all these medicines work as well as each other. Your clinician may be able to help you choose which one (or ones) might be best for you.

Usual dose per day – this will depend on how well you do and what side effects you get. Some people need higher, some need lower doses. It is usually best to start a medicine slowly; it’s kinder to your brain.

How we think it might work – this is how we think the medicine works in the brain.

Dopamine is one of the brain’s chemical messengers. It has many effects but helps the brain concentrate on something and prevents it being distracted. Too much in other areas of the brain can cause overactivity. **Noradrenaline** is another of the brain’s chemical messengers and helps motivation and drive. Taking two medicines with the same way of working doesn’t often help much.

How long it takes to work – this is just a guide, as some people may get better quicker or slower. But don’t give up too early.

Some of the main side effects – many are worse at higher doses, but most wear off after a few weeks.

- = Most people will get this side effect
- = Quite a few will get this side effect
- = Only a few people will get this side effect
- o = This is very rare or not known

The side effects here are:

- **Sleepiness** – feeling sleepy or doped up. This usually wears off
- **Agitation** – feeling tense, under pressure, fidgeting, anxious
- **Headache** – can be mild
- **Feeling sick** – but not usually being sick. This usually wears off
- **Muscle stiffness** – can be stiffness or a slight shake or tremor

There are many other possible side effects.

How long you could or should take it for - how long you take any medicine for will be up to you. Taking a medicine means remembering every day and may be also getting some side effects. It also often means you get well and stay well. You will need to decide what helps you best and what helps you get on with your life.

How to stop it – some medicines can be stopped quickly. Others should be stopped slowly. It is best to try to stop all medicines slowly – it’s kinder on your brain.

Tips on how to get the best out of medication:

- Ask your pharmacist, doctor or case manager for advice
- Try to get the best out of one medicine before trying another. Get the right dose and timings for you, try taking it at different times, and try to cope with any side effects
- Take it regularly every day, unless it is meant to be taken only when required (*find ways to remember e.g. leave the pack by your bed, in the kitchen, next to your toothbrush, next to the TV or computer, but don’t forget to keep them out of the sight and reach of children*)
- Although medicines can help most people’s symptoms of ADHD, they are not always the only answer
- Lifeline provides 24hr telephone crisis support on 13 11 14. For more information or to download mental health and suicide prevention resources visit www.lifeline.org.au.



A handy chart to compare the medicines to help the symptoms of ADHD

Medicine	Usual dose	How we think it might work (probably)	How long it takes to work	Some of the main side effects *					How long you could or should take it for	How to stop it
				Sleepiness	Agitation	Head-ache	Feeling sick	Muscle stiffness		
Main medicines (licensed or which are proven to help)										
Stimulants										
Methylphenidate (e.g. Ritalin®, Concerta XL®, Ritalin XL®)	Up to about 40-50mg a day or up to 60-100mg a day in adults	Boosts dopamine in areas of the brain that control concentration	Within a few hours or days. May take a few weeks for the full effect	○	●●	●●●●	●●	○	Usually for several years. Short gaps may help. Often helps adults too	Should be stopped slowly over several weeks if taken for more than a few months
Lisdexamfetamine (Vyvanse®)	Usually 30-50mg a day, but can be 20-70mg a day			○	●●	●●●●	●●	○		
Dexamphetamine	Usually up to 20mg a day, higher in adults			○	●●●●	●●	●●	○		
Non-stimulants										
Atomoxetine (Strattera®)	40-80mg a day in children. Can be higher in adults	Boosts noradrenaline and dopamine	Half of effect in a week, the rest over 3 months	●●●●	○	●	●●	○	Usually several years. Often helps adults too	No problems known
Guanfacine (Intuniv®)	4-7mg a day, depending on age and weight	Boosts the brain's control of attention and behaviour	About 2-4 weeks	●●	○	●●	●●	○	Usually for several years	Must be slowly over several weeks
Other medicines (usually only used as an add-on for some symptoms that haven't improved)										
Antipsychotics such as risperidone	Risperidone up to about 4mg a day	Decreases dopamine in the alerting parts of the brain and helps calm it down	In a few days for agitation	●●	●	○	○	●●	Can be regular but may also be useful if taken when needed for agitation	Should be no problems
Clonidine	50-300mcg (0.05-0.3mg) a day, usually taken 3-4 times a day	Boosts the brain's control of attention and behaviour	About 4 weeks	●	○	●●	●	○	May be several years. Short gaps may help. May help adults too	Stop slowly over several weeks if taken for more than a few months