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MEDICATION FOR ADHD

What medications are used to treat ADHD?

The most common medications used to treat ADHD are “stimulant medications”. Versions of these medications have been around for more than 50 years and there is lots of research data on safety and efficacy. Newer forms of stimulant medication that are taken only once a day have also been created. They have fewer side effects and less potential for abuse than the older, short acting medications.

The four most common stimulant medications are the “methylphenidates” Concerta and Biphentin, and the “amphetamines” Vyvanse, and Adderall. Less commonly, a non-stimulant medications called Strattera or Intuniv may be recommended.

What is a “medication trial”?

When starting medication for ADHD, it is always a “trial”. Every child is different and it may take time to know what the right medication and dose will be for them. A trial of medication will always start at the lowest dose. During the trial, your child may receive two different doses, the lower dose for the first two weeks, followed by an increased dose.

How are these medications given?

Stimulant medications should be given in the morning. They are expected to last 10-12 hours. Certain medications have to be swallowed whole and others can be dissolved in liquid or sprinkled. We will discuss the options depending on the medication prescribed. In general, it is best for a child to take this medication 7 days a week.

What are some side effects of these medications?

There are a few very common side effects from stimulant medication. Often in the first week or two, children will experience headaches or abdominal discomfort, but these side effects tend to go away with time. Common side effects that can last longer include decreased appetite (usually around lunch time) and difficulty falling asleep. As with any medication, there are a lot of potential side effects that may be less common. Be sure to review the information included with any prescription and discuss additional questions during your appointment or with your pharmacy.

If you are noticing concerning side effects, such as mood or personality changes, it is likely not the right medication for your child. It is very rare for the new medications to cause a flat affect (“zombie-like”).

The goal is control of ADHD symptoms without significant side effects! Your child will not become dependent or addicted to stimulant medications.



How will my child be monitored?

Anytime stimulant medication is started in children (or a dose adjustment is made), we like to see them 4-6 weeks later. This is to check their weight, heart rate, and blood pressure, discuss any side effects, and determine how well the current dose of medication is working. To help provide more information, we ask that both parents and teachers fill out ADHD rating scales *prior to every appointment*. You can find these rating scales and fill them out online at:

www.adhdratingscales.com

See our “ADHD Rating Scales Instructions” handout for more detailed information on how to fill out this form.