



WHAT WE KNOW

Managing Medication for Adults with AD/HD

AD/HD is a mental disorder, and it often lasts from childhood into adulthood. Medication is the basic part of treatment for adults. Medication alone does not always help a person do a better job with problems such as organization, managing time, deciding what is most important or just coping with life.

But proper medication helps the symptoms of AD/HD—such as not being able to concentrate or control unwanted behavior—and allows an adult to learn the skills he or she needs to succeed in life.

This What We Know sheet will:

- help you understand how medications called stimulants can get good results and safely treat AD/HD in adults; and
- discuss nonstimulant medications for AD/HD in adults.

A health professional cannot tell at first which medication will help which patient the most. You may have to try several medications before you find the one—or the combination—that works best for you.

STIMULANTS

Stimulants is the word for a group of drugs that changes the way the brain's chemical "messages" gets from some brain cells to others. They are the first kind of medication a doctor usually tries when treating AD/HD in both children and adults.

The two stimulants most commonly used are called methylphenidate (MPH) and amphetamines (AMP). The government controls them because people could abuse them if they are not used the way a doctor prescribes them.

Several things cause the way a person reacts to stimulant medication: how much medication is taken, how much medication gets into the bloodstream, and how the amount of medication changes the blood levels.

There is no reason to choose one kind of stimulant over the other for someone who has not yet tried either. Both forms of medications -- MPH and AMP -- affect the brain somewhat differently, so they probably affect people differently.

If you don't do well on one kind of stimulant, you and your doctor will most likely try the other. The medication and the amount taken must match each person's individual needs.

Talk to your doctor about what side effects you might have with the stimulant drug he or she prescribes. Side effects of stimulants in adults are generally not serious. They may include one or more of the following: trouble sleeping, headaches, anxiety, loss of appetite and weight loss. Sometimes there are heart rate or blood pressure side effects.

NONSTIMULANT MEDICATIONS

Most nonstimulant medications generally aren't used to treat AD/HD unless stimulants don't help or a patient has another psychiatric illness that would become worse if stimulants were used.

Strattera is a new, nonstimulant drug for people with AD/HD. Its side effects—which are often mild and may go away during treatment—include dry mouth, not being able to sleep, nausea, constipation, loss of appetite, dizziness, decreased sexual interest and performance and problems with urination. It also may have heart and blood pressure side effects. It appears to work as well as stimulants.

ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Antidepressants are medications that help treat depression, but some of them seem to also help with the symptoms of AD/HD. The reverse is also true, some antidepressants may actually make AD/HD symptoms worse. There are different types of antidepressants, and each works somewhat differently.

CHOOSING A MEDICATION

It is very important to match your individual needs with what a medication will probably do—or not do—for your symptoms. For a long time, stimulants have been the best medications to try first. You and your health professional must think about both the benefits and the possible side effects of any medication you try for AD/HD.

For example, an adult may have very serious AD/HD symptoms that could cause him or her to lose a job and a problem with high blood pressure. With help from a health professional, this adult may choose a medication for AD/HD that is helpful during the workday, but does not cause blood pressure problems.

KEEPING TRACK OF THE EFFECTS OF MEDICATION

It is important to know how well your medication works over time. Keeping track of how you react to your medication takes a lot of effort. The effort is worth it because you and your healthcare professional will then know when it's best to take the medication and how much you should take. It will help you both decide if you need other medications or if, for example, you need more help with problem behavior. You may need coaching, tutoring or counseling in addition to the medication.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

Treating the basic symptoms of AD/HD is very important, but it is often not the only goal of treatment. Treatment can also help you with problems you have in the real world. It can help you be more self-sufficient and to better cope with the demands of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

Problems with AD/HD can continue after childhood. Medication is the basic part of treatment. Psychostimulants are usually the medications tried first, but many nonstimulant treatments are available, too. Medications can help most adults with AD/HD lead a better life.

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