

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 hard 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.

- They are in no special order, although methylphenidate is usually first choice
- We have listed them as 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. There is more about this on the website.

Dopamine is one of the brain's chemical messengers. It has many effects but helps the brain concentrate on something and to prevent 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.

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 – these are just a few 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:

- **Drowsiness** – feeling sleepy or doped up
- **Agitation** – feeling tense, under pressure, fidgeting, anxious
- **Headache** – can be mild
- **Nausea** – feeling sick, but not usually being sick
- **Muscle stiffness** – can be stiffness or a slight shake or tremor

There are many other possible side effects.

Please see our website for more details of each of the medicines and 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:

- Read the website to make sure you know what the medicine is for, when and how to take it and for how long to take it
- Try to get the best out of one medicine before trying another. Get the right dose 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, in your car if you have one, 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, they are not always the only answer. Please see our website for ideas for self-help, and help from others

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
				Drowsiness	Agitation	Head-ache	Feeling sick	Muscle stiffness		
Main medicines (licensed or which are proven to help)										
Methylphenidate (e.g. Ritalin [®] , Medikinet XL [®] , Concerta XL [®] , Equasym XL [®])	Up to about 40mg a day (depends on your weight). Can be up to 60-100mg a day or more 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	0	●●	●●●●	●●	0	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
Atomoxetine (Strattera [®])	40-80mg a day in children. Can be higher in adults	Boosts noradrenaline and dopamine	Takes about 4 weeks to start working, 3 months to work fully	●●●●	0	●	●●	0	Usually for several years. Often helps adults too	No problems known
Dexamfetamine (Dexadrine [®])	Usually up to 20mg a day, a bit higher 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	0	●●●●	●●	●●	0	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
Other medicines (usually only used when the main medicines have not worked or as an add-on)										
Antipsychotics such as risperidone or olanzapine	Risperidone up to about 4mg a day. Olanzapine up to about 10mg a day	Decreases dopamine in the alerting parts of the brain and so helps to calm the brain	In a few days for agitation	●●	●	0	0	●●	Can be regular but may also be useful if taken when needed for agitation	Should be no problems
Clonidine (Dixarit [®] , Catapres [®])	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	●	0	●●	●	0	Sometimes 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