

Methylphenidate (pron. methyl-fenny-date)

What is methylphenidate used for?

Methylphenidate (also known as Ritalin[®], Concerta[®], Medikinet[®] and Equasym[®]) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and sometimes narcolepsy. ADHD can cause you to be easily distracted, not finishing things, getting into trouble, having driving accidents, not sticking with a job, and having relationship problems. It is available as plain tablets and long-acting tablets and capsules.

What is the usual dose of methylphenidate?

The usual dose of methylphenidate is around 36mg a day (depending on your weight). It can often be higher in adults e.g. up to 72mg a day or more.

How should I take methylphenidate?

Swallow the tablets or capsules with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing. This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat.

When should I take methylphenidate?

Plain tablets: try to make sure you take your doses at regular times each day, but make sure the last dose is no later than about teatime. There is no problem about taking methylphenidate with or after food.

If you have the long-acting tablets or capsules, then once a day in the morning is best, to make sure it doesn't make it even harder for you to fall asleep.

Concerta XL[®] should be taken once a day at breakfast time.

Medikinet XL[®] should be taken in the morning, with or after breakfast.

Equasym XL[®] should be taken in the morning before breakfast.

What are the alternatives to methylphenidate?

There are some other medicine (e.g. atomoxetine, dexamfetamine), talking therapies and treatments for ADHD. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will methylphenidate take to work?

It usually starts to work within a few hours of a dose. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" or on our website for more help and advice.

How long will I need to keep taking methylphenidate for?

Probably for several years. Please look one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice.

Is methylphenidate addictive?

Methylphenidate is a stimulant drug. In adults, it is possible that methylphenidate can be addictive because it can be taken for its stimulant effect. In fact the opposite might be true because the person will not try to self-medicate with illicit drugs to manage their symptoms. There is no evidence that taking methylphenidate will cause someone to take illicit drugs when they are older.

Can I stop taking methylphenidate suddenly?

It is unwise to stop taking it suddenly, even if the symptoms have improved. At smaller doses, it can probably be stopped suddenly. At higher doses, it is possible that 'withdrawal' effects might be seen. These would include extreme tiredness, rebound hyperactivity, increased appetite and depression. If this were to happen by accident, then starting methylphenidate again would get rid of these effects. When the time comes, you should withdraw methylphenidate by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks. You should discuss this fully with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of methylphenidate?

If you are taking the long-acting tablets or capsules, taking a dose more than a few hours late will mean that it may be difficult to sleep. Do not try to catch up by taking two or more doses at once as you may get more side-effects. You should tell your doctor about this next time you meet.

Will methylphenidate affect my other medication?

Methylphenidate has only a few interactions with other medicines:

- Methylphenidate should not be taken with a class of antidepressant called the MAOIs
- Methylphenidate can increase the effect of phenytoin and tricyclics (e.g. dosulepin, imipramine, lofepramine)
- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and methylphenidate.

Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor's instructions carefully. There are many other possible drug interactions.

What sort of side-effects might occur if I am taking methylphenidate?

The table below will show you some of the main side effects you might get from methylphenidate.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
VERY COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Headache	Your head is pounding and painful.	Try paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking.
COMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Anorexia	Loss of weight, not feeling hungry.	If this is a problem, ask to see a pharmacist or dietician for advice. It normally wears off after a few weeks.
Nausea and vomiting	Feeling sick and being sick. Abdominal pain	If it is bad, contact your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose. Taking it after food may help. It should wear off after a few weeks.
Nervousness	Feeling more anxious or nervous	This should wear off. If not, mention it to your doctor next time you meet.
Nasopharyngitis	Cough, sore nose and throat	This should wear off but see your doctor if it does not wear off.
Aggression	Being aggressive, irritable, depressed, hostile and perhaps suicidal thinking.	If this occurs, discuss with your doctor as soon as possible.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint	Do not stand up too quickly. Try and lie down when you feel it coming on. Do not drive.
Insomnia	Not being able to fall asleep at night	Discuss this with your doctor. He/she may be able to change the time of your dose or doses. Make sure you take the dose early enough in the day.
LESS COMMON (<i>much fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Tachycardia	A pulse rate more than 120 beats per minute while you are resting.	If your pulse is over about 120 (i.e. not after exercise), you should mention this to your doctor. It may be you need a different dose or a beta-blocker to help slow it down.

Do not be worried by this list of side effects. Some people get no side effects at all and others may get some effects that are not listed in this table. If you think you might have a side effect to your medicine, you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you want to know more, go to our website for links to other websites with more information.

Will I need a blood test if I am taking methylphenidate?

You should not need any blood tests but you might need your heart checked before starting methylphenidate.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking methylphenidate?

You may feel a bit light-headed at first when taking methylphenidate. Until this wears off, or you know how methylphenidate affects you, do not drive or operate machinery. You should be careful as it may affect your reaction times.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You should also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find lots more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how it works, doses and interactions, and about the conditions. The "Handy charts" will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects.