

# what about medicines for ADHD?

## questions from teens who have ADHD



**Q:** What can I do **besides** taking medicines?

**A:** Medicines and behavior therapies are the only treatments that have been shown by scientific studies to work consistently for ADHD. Medicines are prescribed by a doctor, while behavior therapies usually are done with a counselor. These 2 treatments are probably best used together, but you might be able to do well with one or the other. You **can't rely on other treatments** such as biofeedback, allergy treatments, special diets, vision training, or chiropractic because there isn't enough evidence that shows they work.

Counseling may help you learn how to cope with some issues you may face. And there are things **YOU** can do to help yourself. For example, **things that may help you stay focused** include using a daily planner for schoolwork and other activities, making to-do lists, and even getting enough sleep.

**Q:** How can medicines help me?

**A:** There are several different ADHD medicines. They work by causing the brain to have more *neurotransmitters* in the right places. Neurotransmitters are chemicals in the brain that help us focus our attention, control our impulses, organize and plan, and stick to routines. Medicines for ADHD **can help you focus your thoughts and ignore distractions** so that you can reach your **full potential**. They also can help you control your emotions and behavior. Check with your pediatrician.

**Q:** Are medicines **safe**?

**A:** For most teens with ADHD, stimulant medicines are safe and effective if taken as recommended. However, like most medicines, there **could be side effects**. Luckily, the side effects tend to happen early on, are **usually mild**, and don't last too long. If you have any side effects, tell your pediatrician. Changes may need to be made in your medicines or their dosages.

- **Most common side effects** include decreased appetite or weight loss, problems falling asleep, headaches, jitteriness, and stomachaches.
- **Less common side effects** include a bad mood as medicines wear off (called the rebound effect) and facial twitches or tics.

**Q:** Will medicines change my **personality**?

**A:** Medicines won't change who you are and should not change your personality. If you notice changes in your mood or personality, **tell your pediatrician**. Occasionally when medicines wear off, some teens become more irritable for a short time. An adjustment of the medicines by your pediatrician may be helpful.

**Q:** Will medicines affect my **growth**?

**A:** Medicines will **not** keep you from growing. Significant growth delay is a very rare side effect of some medicines prescribed for ADHD. Most scientific studies show that taking these medicines has little to no long-term effect on growth in most cases.

**Q:** Do I need to take medicines **at school**?

**A:** There are 3 types of medicines used for teens with ADHD: **short acting** (immediate release), **intermediate acting**, and **long acting**. You can avoid taking medicines at school if you take the intermediate- or long-acting kind. Long-acting medicines usually are taken once in the morning or evening. Short-acting medicines usually are taken every 4 hours.

**Q:** Does taking medicines make me a drug user?

**A: NO!** Although you may need medicines to help you stay in control of your behavior, medicines used to treat **ADHD do not lead to drug abuse**. In fact, **taking medicines as prescribed by your pediatrician and doing better in school may help you avoid drug use and abuse**. (But **never** give or share your medicines with anyone else.)

**Q:** Will I have to take medicines forever?

**A:** In most cases, ADHD continues later in life. Whether you need to keep taking medicines as an adult depends on your own needs. **The need for medicines may change over time.** Many adults with ADHD have learned how to **succeed in life** without medicines by using behavior therapies.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.



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