

# Drugs for Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder



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## What is an ADHD medicine?

For children and adolescents with ADHD, taking medication prescribed by a doctor (including CNS stimulants or non-CNS stimulants) is an important part of the treatment plan. The use of drug therapy can improve ADHD children's behavior problems, can help them to concentrate, reduced activity levels and enhanced self-control.

## CNS Stimulants

CNS stimulants are capable of stimulating the front of the brain, the main role is to balance the brain transmitter substance level. It blocks the reuptake of norepinephrine and dopamine into the presynaptic neuron. Its advantage is that the drug does not have dependence problem and convenient to take with rapid onset of action. If taken as directed, symptoms could be improved in about one to two weeks.

Methylphenidate, is one of the drugs for ADHD, and the only CNS stimulant registered in Hong Kong. Methylphenidate has been widely used around the world for more than fifty years, the efficacy and safety has long been verified. The two most commonly prescribed Methylphenidate are Ritalin and Concerta, the former can be administered 2-3 times a day, effect can be maintained for 4-8 hours; the latter can be taken once a day, effect can be maintained for about 12 hours.

Side effects include upset stomach, reducing appetite, headache, rapid heartbeat, unstable blood pressure and sleeping difficulties. Doctors can adjust medication dosage according to lifestyle changes to improve symptoms, side effects are generally well-tolerated.

However, drugs and dosages have to be individualized. For details, please consult your doctor.

## Non-CNS Stimulants

The second class of drugs is non-CNS stimulants, the most commonly prescribed is atomoxetine. It is not a stimulant drug, but an antidepressant. It helps to improve concentration, hyperactivity and impulsive behavior. This drug is particularly useful for those who do not respond to stimulants, or not tolerate to stimulant drugs. In addition, doctors also use these drugs to control anxiety, insomnia and other symptoms.

The side effects of CNS-stimulants and non-CNS stimulants are considered minor and transient. At the start of treatment, patients may experience loss of appetite, headache, stomach pain and insomnia.

It is worth noting that during the holidays, parents should not stop the medication because their children do not attend school. Please consult your doctor before making appropriate arrangements.

## *Doctors would prescribe ADHD drugs according to different circumstances:*

1. If the children or adolescents do not have any comorbidity, it is generally recommended to prescribe methylphenidate.
2. If the children or adolescents have other symptoms, such as tic disorders, Tourette Syndrome, epilepsy or at risk of improper doping, generally by-case basis, doctors would consider methylphenidate or atomoxetine prescription.
3. If the children or adolescents do not respond well to highest dose methylphenidate, or intolerated to side effects, doctors may consider switching to atomoxetine.
4. According to individual needs, such as duration of action. Concerta, the long-acting methylphenidate may be prescribed. The efficacy can be maintained for about 12 hours, to avoid the child or adolescent's needs to take their medication at school.
5. The view of children or adolescents, and their parents.
6. Will the drugs be used by others inappropriately.

In fact, some parents still have doubt about the "psychotropic drugs" their children are taking, that the drugs can cause side effects such as "dementia", "become stupid" and some other side effects. In fact, by taking the doctor's prescription drugs properly, it helps to improve the ability to focus and reduce impulsive symptoms effectively and does not affect intelligence or cause dementia and other adverse reactions. In the case of side effects, patients should not be worried, please tell your doctor as soon as possible in order to make appropriate adjustments. Parents should work with their doctors and closely monitored the situation.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***May I stop taking my medicine?***

It is necessary to take your medicine promptly in order to control your illness. According to scientific research, the rates of relapse increase drastically if one is not taking their medications. If you disregard your condition, your chance of recovery would be lessened.

### ***What to do before taking my medication?***

Before taking your medication, you must always ensure whether the medicine belongs to you, always follow your doctor's instructions, and those on the pharmacy label. You should never change the prescribed dosage or stop your medication without your doctor's direction. And never take two doses at the same time if you forget to take a dose.

### ***How to deal with side effects?***

Talk to your doctor if you experience any side effects. Your doctor may adjust the dosage in order to minimize the adverse effects. Do not stop taking your medicine without your doctor's direction.

### ***How long do I need to take my medicine?***

The duration of therapy varies according to the types and severities of illness. Generally speaking, patients with schizophrenia, particularly those with a history of relapse, need to take their medications for a longer period of time. But if your condition is stable, your doctor may adjust the dosage to the minimal-effective dose to control your illness. What should the care-givers do if patients refuse to take their medications? Do not criticize the patients. Try to find out the underlying reason for their refusal e.g. if the patients experience any undesirable side effects or have any necessary concern about their medications, etc. Encouragement from the family and comprehensive explanation of their drug treatment is crucial. Contact the healthcare professionals if the patients still refuse to take the medications

### ***What should the care-givers do if patients refuse to take their medications?***

Do not criticize the patients. Try to find out the underlying reason for their refusal e.g. if the patients experience any undesirable side effects or have any necessary worry about their medications, etc. Encouragement from the family and comprehensive explanation of their drug treatment is crucial. Contact the healthcare professionals if the patients still refuse to take the medications.

#### **DO**

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| 1. | Strictly follow the doctor's instructions  |
| 2. | Pay attention to the drug name, dosage and frequency, etc. before taking your medication |
| 3. | Read the prescription label carefully  |
| 4. | Pay attention to the dosage, indication, contraindication and side effects               |
| 5. | Understand the method of administration  |
| 6. | Store your medication properly   |
| 7. | Complete the prescribed course unless otherwise directed                                 |
| 8. | If you have any questions, talk to your family and ask your health care professionals    |

#### **DON'Ts**

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|----|---|
| 1. | Change the dosage of your medication on your own            |
| 2. | Stop taking your medication except on your doctor's advice. |
| 3. | Drink alcohol with your medication.                         |
| 4. | Put your medication in other bottle.                        |
| 5. | Take other medication unless directed by your doctor.       |
| 6. | Lie to your doctors about your compliance                   |