

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 symptoms. Medicines are prescribed by a doctor, while behavior therapies usually are done with a trained counselor in behavior treatment. 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. Counseling can help you find an organization system or a checklist.

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 doctor to learn more about this.

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 doctor. 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 doctor. Occasionally when medicines wear off, some teens become more irritable for a short time. An adjustment of the medicines by your doctor 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 doctor 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 or finding jobs that suit their strengths and weaknesses.

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