

ADHD Medication

Explained



Key Points

- **Medication is the first-line treatment choice for adults with ADHD.**
- **Medication is effective in around 80% of people with ADHD.**
- **There are two types of medication for ADHD: stimulants and non-stimulants.**
- **All medications, for any condition, have side effects.**
- **Non-pharmaceutical medicines such as supplements have little or no evidence that they work and are often not tested for safety.**

How is ADHD Treated?

The primary treatment option for adult ADHD in the UK is medication. Many people with ADHD are 'medication hesitant', even though medication is a proven and tested option that is effective in 80% of people with ADHD.

There are several reasons why people with ADHD may be hesitant to take medication. These reasons include:

- Fear of side effects: Some people are afraid of the side effects that can come with ADHD medication, such as anxiety, insomnia, and loss of appetite. It is important to note that *all drugs have some side effects in some people*.
- Misconceptions about ADHD.
- Fear of addiction: Some people are afraid of becoming addicted to ADHD medication. However, it is important to note that ADHD medication is not addictive in the same way that illegal drugs are.
- Lack of trust in pharmaceutical companies.

Your doctor can help you to understand the risks and benefits of medication and make the best decision for you.

If you are hesitant to take ADHD medication, there are other treatment options available, although they are often less effective or lack evidence of their effectiveness. These options include therapy, coaching and lifestyle changes.

- Therapy can help you to learn how to manage your symptoms and improve your overall functioning.

- Coaching can help you build coping strategies to deal with the day-to-day impact of ADHD.
- Lifestyle changes, such as getting regular exercise, sleep and eating a healthy diet, can also help to improve symptoms of ADHD.

Adult ADHD Medication.

As ADHD can cause significant problems in a person's life, including difficulty in education, work, and relationships, medication can be a powerful tool to improve many of these problems.

There are several medications available to treat adult ADHD in the UK. These medications can be effective in improving symptoms of ADHD, but they can also have side effects.

Types of ADHD Medications.

There are two main types of ADHD medications available in the UK: stimulants and non-stimulants.

- Stimulants are the most prescribed type of ADHD medication. They work by increasing the levels of certain 'neurotransmitters' in the brain, such as dopamine and noradrenaline. Stimulants can be effective in improving symptoms of ADHD, such as inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. However, they can also have side effects, such as anxiety, insomnia, and loss of appetite. The stimulants available in the UK include methylphenidate (also known as Medikinet, Concerta and Xaggitin), dexamphetamine (also known as Adderall, Dexedrine or Amfexa) and lisdexamphetamine (also known as Elvanse or Vyvanse).

- Non-stimulants are not as commonly prescribed as stimulants, but they can be an effective treatment option for some people with ADHD. Non-stimulants work by increasing the levels of norepinephrine in the brain. They can be effective in improving symptoms of ADHD, but they may not be as effective as stimulants. Non-stimulants also have fewer side effects than stimulants. The non-stimulant licensed for use in the UK is called atomoxetine (also known as Strattera).

‘Off-Label’ Medication.

Prescribing ‘off-label’ means that a doctor prescribes a medication for a condition that is not listed on the medication's license in the UK. This can happen for several reasons, such as:

- There is no licensed medication available to treat the condition.
- The licensed medication is not effective or safe for the patient.
- The patient has a rare or complex condition that requires a specialized treatment.
- Usual medication is not effective in some patients.

Off-label prescribing is common in the UK, and it is generally considered to be safe and effective. However, it is important to note that off-label medications are not regulated in the same way as licensed medications, and there may be limited data on their safety and effectiveness. Off-label medications in the UK include bupropion (also known as Wellbutrin).

Supplements and ADHD.

Many people prefer to attempt to treat the ADHD using over-the-counter supplements, such as omega three fatty acids, so called 'nootropic' mushroom products, such as Lions Mane, or magnesium. There is currently not sufficient evidence for the effectiveness of the supplements in treating ADHD, and importantly, their safety, and whether they interact with other medications that a person takes, have often not been adequately tested.

How ADHD Medications Work.

Stimulants and non-stimulants work in similar ways to improve symptoms of ADHD.

- Stimulants work by increasing the levels of the neurotransmitters dopamine, noradrenaline, and serotonin in the brain. Dopamine and noradrenaline are involved in attention, focus, and impulse control and serotonin is thought to be involved in mood. When the levels of these neurotransmitters are increased, it can help to improve symptoms of ADHD as they usually do not work effectively in the brains of people with ADHD.
- Non-stimulants work by increasing the levels of noradrenaline in the brain. Noradrenaline is involved in attention and focus. When the levels of noradrenaline are increased, it can help to improve symptoms of ADHD.

Effectiveness of ADHD Medications

Stimulants and non-stimulants can be effective in improving symptoms of ADHD. However, the effectiveness of these medications varies from person to

person. Stimulants are effective in around 70% of people with ADHD, and non-stimulants bring this number up to 80%.

Side Effects of ADHD Medications

Stimulants and non-stimulants can have side effects. The most common side effects of stimulants are anxiety, insomnia, and loss of appetite. The most common side effects of non-stimulants are nausea, vomiting, and stomach pain.

Summary

ADHD is a common disorder that can cause significant problems in a person's life. There are several treatment options available for ADHD, including medication, therapy, and lifestyle changes. You can discuss these options with your clinical team at the point of diagnosis, if symptoms of side effects change, or in your annual review.