

Stimulant Medications

Stimulant medications are the most effective medications for the treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Benefits of stimulant medications for people with ADHD include improvements in concentration, ability to sit still, and ability to think before acting.

What do they do?

Stimulant medications work by making chemical messengers in the brain called neurotransmitters more available. This improves communication between neurons and reduces ADHD symptoms.

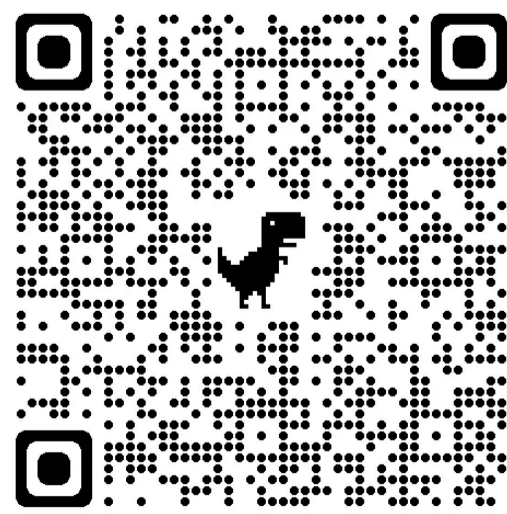
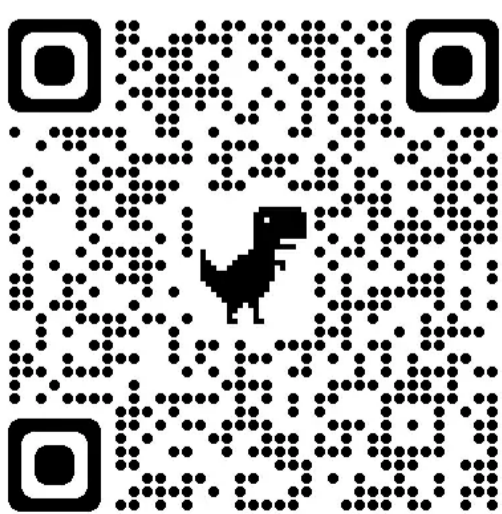
Which one should my child take?

There are 2 main types of stimulants called the methylphenidate group and the amphetamine group. In each group there are several formulations that differ in how you take them or how long they last.

Some formulations are pills that must be swallowed and others are liquid, chewable, or can be mixed with liquid.

Short-acting formulations last about 4 hours, and long-acting formulations can last up to 12 hours. Your child's provider will help you select a formulation or a combination of formulations to help your child control ADHD symptoms throughout their day.

Stimulants only work on the days taken - they don't build up in your system.



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What are side effects of stimulants?

Stimulant side effects and what to do:

Decreased appetite: may get better with time. Monitor weight. Encourage high-calorie meals or snacks later in the day. Don't force your child to eat.

Trouble getting to sleep: can happen if the stimulant lasts too long. Consider giving the dose earlier or using a shorter-acting formulation.

Moodiness or irritability: is more common in younger children and may improve with time. Discuss with your child's provider.

Headache, stomachache, and tics or picking at skin: are less common. Discuss with your child's provider.

Dizziness, heart pounding, chest pain: stop the medication and consult your child's provider.

Growth changes: monitor your child's growth and discuss with your child's provider.

Does my child have to take medication?

It is up to you whether your child takes medication for ADHD. However, research shows that medication is more effective than any therapy for the core symptoms of ADHD.

Research also shows that children with untreated ADHD do more poorly in school, and are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance use than children whose ADHD is treated.