

Learning About How to Care for Your Child Who Is Starting Medicines for ADHD



How can you care for your child?

Medicines for ADHD may help your child be more calm and focused. Stimulant medicines are often used to treat ADHD. If they don't work, your child's doctor might prescribe a nonstimulant medicine. Nonstimulants may be used alone or along with stimulants. Here are some ways to care for your child if your child is starting medicines for ADHD.

- Tell the doctor if your child has other health conditions.

Let the doctor know if your child has any heart problems or heart defects or if there is a family history of these problems. This may affect what type of medicine the doctor prescribes for your child.

- Watch for side effects.

Many side effects will go away after your child takes the medicine for a few weeks. If they don't go away, the doctor may need to adjust the dose or timing of the medicine. Or the doctor may need to change the medicine.

- Common side effects include loss of appetite, trouble sleeping, and feeling nervous. Other side effects are headaches, dizziness, an upset stomach, and the heart beating fast or irregularly (palpitations). Also watch for mood changes and repeated jerks or muscle movements (tics).
 - Stimulant medicines may be linked to slower growth in children, especially in the first year of taking the medicine. But these medicines may not affect a child's final height as an adult.
 - Some nonstimulant medicines may increase the risk that a child will think about or try suicide, especially in the first few weeks of use. Some warning signs of suicide include talking about feeling hopeless or wanting to die. Withdrawing from friends and family is also a warning sign. Get help right away if you see any of these signs.
- Help your child manage mild side effects.

For example, if your child has trouble sleeping, try keeping the bedroom quiet, dark, and cool. Or if your child has an upset stomach, they may need to eat smaller meals throughout the day. Ask your child's doctor for more ways to manage mild side effects.

- Give medicines as prescribed.

If your child misses a dose, don't give a double dose. Don't stop giving your child the medicine. If you want to stop or reduce your child's use of the medicine, talk to the doctor first.

- Keep track of the medicines.
 - Tell your child to not share their medicines with others.
 - Make sure that your child doesn't misuse medicines, such as taking a larger dose than prescribed.
 - Make sure that medicines are stored safely at home and at school. Lock up medicines. And store them at room temperature.
 - If your child takes a midday dose, let your child's teacher know. The school nurse or other staff member will need to give your child the medicine.
- Look for signs that the medicine is working.

Some medicines start working quickly. Others may take several weeks. Ask the doctor when you might notice any changes in your child. Your child may:

- Have more focus.
- Be calmer or less restless.
- Have better relationships.
- Do better at school.
- Check in with your child's teacher.

Tell the teacher about your child's medicines. Ask for progress reports on how your child is doing in class.

- Let the doctor know if your child's symptoms aren't getting better.

And let the doctor know if the medicine stops working too early in the day. The doctor may need to adjust the dose or timing of the medicine. Or your child may need to try several different medicines. It can take a while to find the medicine and dosage that works best. Your child also may need to be checked for other health conditions.

- Find a counselor for your child.

Seeing a counselor along with taking the medicine can help your child. Ask your child's doctor for a referral.

Where to get help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

If your child talks about suicide, self-harm, a mental health crisis, a substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress, get help right away. You can:

- Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**.
- Call **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.
- Text **HOME** to **741741** to access the Crisis Text Line.

Consider saving these numbers in your phone.

Go to **988lifeline.org** for more information or to chat online.