

# 13 Questions to Ask Before Starting Any ADHD Medication

Whether taking ADHD medication for the first time or switching to a new treatment plan, you should first pose these questions to your doctor.



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From the ADHD Experts at

**ADDITUDE**

Strategies and Support *for* ADHD & LD

# ADDITUDE

## Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—  
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

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Whether taking ADHD medication for the first time or switching to a new treatment plan, you should first pose these questions to your doctor.

*Adapted from Laurie Dupar, PMHNP*

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## **1. What type of medication is this: stimulant or non-stimulant?**

Medications used to treat ADHD generally fall into two categories: stimulants and non-stimulants. Stimulants include—but aren't limited to—Adderall, Vyvanse, Ritalin, and Daytrana. Non-stimulants include Strattera, Wellbutrin, Intuniv, and a few others. Make sure you know the category of your prescribed medication; it will affect administration, expected side effects, and possibly diet. If the medication is a stimulant, ask whether it's a methylphenidate (like Ritalin) or an amphetamine (like Adderall)—though these medications work in similar ways, they're not the same and can lead to different outcomes in adults and children.

## **2. How does this medication work in the brain? How does it help ADHD?**

In brief, scientific research suggests that stimulants work by changing the levels of dopamine in the brain; non-stimulants like Strattera

Read “7 Rules for Using ADHD Medications Safely” at <http://additude/3z>

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instead interact with norepinephrine. Ask your doctor to explain how your medication affects your mind and body, and what changes in ADHD symptoms to expect.

**3. What side effects are normal with this medication?**

All medications come with some risk of side effects. Ask your doctor to go over the most common side effects—as well as some rare ones that can be extremely dangerous—associated with your prescription. If you're a parent asking about your child, ask the doctor what signs you should look out for—especially if your child isn't old enough to properly articulate what she's feeling.

**4. What health monitoring checks need to be done, if any?**

Some doctors insist on regular cardiovascular checks for patients taking stimulants, particularly those with pre-existing heart conditions. On the other hand, non-stimulants—clonidine or guanfacine in particular—can cause blood pressure to drop to dangerously low levels, so many doctors monitor blood pressure carefully. Ask your doctor about the type and frequency of tests you should expect.

To read user reviews of common ADHD medications, go to <http://additu.de/reviews>

**5. Are there any side effects that would warrant me to call you or to stop taking or administering this medication?**

Most side effects—like nausea, appetite loss, or irritability—are mild and should be no cause for alarm. Others can indicate a serious problem with a medication. For stimulants, these red flags include dizziness, fainting, pounding heartbeat, shortness of breath, weakness or numbness, or chest pain. When taking non-stimulants, serious allergic reactions—like hives, swelling, or trouble breathing—should be reported to a doctor immediately. Strattera, in particular, carries an increased risk of suicidal thoughts or actions. If you notice these in yourself or your child, call your doctor immediately.

**6. How will I know if this medication is working?**

“When your medication is working effectively, you will have a *sustained focus*,” says Laurie Dupar, PMHNP. “We’re not talking about hyperfocus or ‘zombie focus’—we’re just talking about a sustained focus. You are able to perhaps get paperwork done, or you’re able to finish making the bed.” Other signs include an improved mood, less extreme emotions, and less impulsivity—both physical and verbal. Ask your doctor which signs are typical for your particular symptoms, and how long they commonly take to appear.

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**7. When should this medication be taken?**

Stimulants typically start working within an hour and wear off within set time frames, so patients should work with their doctors to determine the most effective dosage time(s) given their unique schedules. Non-stimulants, on the other hand, need to build up in the body over several weeks and tend to work best if taken at the same time every day. Some patients report feeling drowsy after taking a non-stimulant; in these cases, experts suggest taking them at night. Your doctor should be open to discussing timing strategies with you.

**8. Must this medication be taken every day?**

Since stimulants start working quickly and wash out of the body within a day, most patients can skip a dose or two without suffering any withdrawal-related symptoms—but this doesn't mean inconsistent use is the best choice. Talk to your doctor about drug holidays and effective treatment schedules before you decide to skip a dose of your stimulant. Non-stimulants usually need to be taken every day—otherwise, therapeutic levels of the medication in the bloodstream may drop and the medication may become less effective. If you want to stop taking a non-stimulant altogether, discuss it with your doctor—otherwise, do your best to take the medication every day.

Read one adult's personal story, "ADHD Meds Gave Me a Whole New Life" at <http://additu.de/new-life>

**9. If I want to stop taking this medication or stop administering it to my child, how do I do that?**

Stimulant medications generally do not cause withdrawal problems, but most experts recommend you taper off them slowly instead of quitting cold turkey. Non-stimulants are a little trickier, and may need to be tapered off in a structured pattern. Your doctor should be able to recommend an effective strategy for discontinuing medication; ask how other patients under her care have done so successfully.

**10. Is this medication taken with or without food?**

Different medications carry different food requirements. Some stimulants, for example, react poorly to Vitamin C; they shouldn't be taken with orange juice, a common breakfast drink. Ask your doctor to explain what interactions your medication might have with your food, as well as how to time your meals to maximize your medication's benefits.

**11. How long will this medication take to start working?**

Most stimulants start working within an hour, but make sure your

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doctor lets you know exactly what to expect from yours. Non-stimulants can take a few weeks to start showing results.

**12. How long do the effects of this medication last?**

When it comes to stimulants, you can't always trust the projected dosage window. Ask your doctor how long the medication should last, but also ask what to do if it lasts for a shorter or longer time than projected. When used properly, non-stimulants should offer around-the-clock coverage. Tell your doctor if this is not the case.

**13. What's the best way to monitor and adjust the dose of this medication? When is our next appointment?**

Whether you're starting ADHD medication for the first time, or switching to a new medication, your doctor should always have a plan for assessing and optimizing the prescription's effectiveness. Doctors vary on this, so ask your provider what schedule he prefers for follow-up appointments.

Even doctors make mistakes! Learn about common medication mishaps you and your physician should watch out for at <http://additude/39>

## **ADDitude Special Reports Available Now**

[www.adhdreports.com](http://www.adhdreports.com)

### **ADHD Medication and Treatment**

**The latest information on managing medication, starting behavior therapy, evaluating alternative treatments, and more.**

You're relieved to know, finally, that your or your child's symptoms are due to ADHD. But now, you have questions — on everything from which medications are available to how to tell if they're working properly. In this comprehensive special report, you'll learn how to seek an accurate diagnosis and plan a treatment plan that's right for you or your child.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: <http://additu.de/treatment>

### **9 Conditions Often Diagnosed with ADHD**

**Depression. Bipolar Disorder. Anxiety. OCD. And five more conditions that often show up alongside attention deficit.**

About 80 percent of individuals with ADHD are diagnosed with at least one other psychiatric condition at some time in their lives. This in-depth special report looks at the nine most common, outlining symptoms, treatment strategies, and differentiating features of each. Plus, strategies for living well with any mental health condition.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/related>

### **Mindfulness and Other Natural Treatments**

**The best non-medical treatments for ADHD, including exercise, green time, and mindful meditation.**

Learn how mindfulness works on ADHD brains, and how to begin practicing it today. Plus, research the benefits of other alternative treatments like yoga and deep breathing exercises—including some designed especially for kids—as well as the science behind each natural therapy.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/mindfulness>

## **FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets**

### **Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?**

Use this self-test to find out if your child's problems at school may be due to LD.

### **Is It Depression?**

Depression is a serious mood disorder, but it's not always easy to recognize.

### **Who Can Treat ADHD?**

Doctor? Psychiatrist? Coach? Learn who can treat your attention deficit.

### **You Know You Have ADHD When...**

Real ADHDers share personal stories highlighting the lighter side of living with attention deficit.

### **Is It Adult ADHD?**

Habitually disorganized? Always running late? It could be ADHD.

### **Celebrities Living with ADHD**

Famous people on how they found success with attention deficit.

### **It's Not ADHD: 3 Common Diagnosis Mistakes**

Doctors are sometimes too quick to diagnose ADHD. Read up on common misdiagnoses.

### **Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:**

<http://additu.de/freedownloads>



## FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

### Sensory Processing Disorder in Kids

>> <http://additu.de/spd>

Is your child with ADHD extra sensitive when it comes to tastes, sounds, smells, or even how a certain fabric feels on their skin? It could be Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). Carol Kranowitz, M.A., explains how parents can identify, treat, and help their children manage SPD.

### Mastering ADHD Medications

>> <http://additu.de/22>

Dr. William Dodson, a board-certified adult psychiatrist who specializes in treating ADHD, discusses the many medication options for ADHD and how each one works. Learn about choosing a medication, minimizing side effects, and finding the right dosage for yourself or your child.

### Exposing ADHD Myths: Science's New Understanding of the Disorder

>> <http://additu.de/understanding>

Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D., offers the latest research to refute common myths about attention deficit disorder, including “ADHD isn’t real,” “bad parenting causes ADHD,” and “most kids outgrow ADHD.”

### What to Treat First?

>> <http://additu.de/6k>

ADHD is frequently accompanied by one or more comorbid conditions, such as depression, anxiety, learning disabilities, or ODD. Dr. Larry B. Silver explains what to look for, and how to treat dual diagnoses—as well as how dealing with comorbidities can affect life for an ADHD child or adult.

### 7 Fixes for Self-Defeating ADHD Behaviors

>> <http://additu.de/brown>

Are your bad habits setting you up for failure? Find out what behaviors to watch for, and seven simple changes that can help you reach your full potential and put you on the path to success. Entrepreneur and ADHD coach Alan Brown teaches “fix-it” strategies that he used to cope with his own ADHD.

## FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, success at school, adult ADHD, and parenting strategies: <http://additu.de/email>

### Adult ADHD and LD

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

### Parenting ADHD and LD Children

Behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, making friends, and more critical strategies for parents

### ADHD and LD at School

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more

### Treating ADHD

Treatment options including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies