

Flourish



ADHD Medication

Facts for Adults

ADHD medication is one of the most researched treatments in mental health. For many adults, medication can reduce daily impairment, support emotional regulation, and lower long-term risks associated with untreated ADHD. Medication is optional and should always be considered based on individual needs, health history, and preferences.

How ADHD Medication Works

ADHD is associated with differences in how the brain regulates dopamine and norepinephrine, especially in the prefrontal cortex. This area supports attention, impulse control, emotional regulation, and task initiation.

Stimulant medications increase the availability of dopamine and norepinephrine and help brain signals last longer.

Non-stimulant medications support attention and regulation through slower or different pathways, including receptor-based mechanisms.

Medication supports regulation. It does not change personality or identity.

Types of ADHD Medication

Stimulants

- Typically the most effective option for adults
- Often work within days
- Include amphetamine-based and methylphenidate-based medications

Non-Stimulants

- May be helpful when stimulants are not tolerated
- Often take weeks to reach full effect
- Some begin affecting neurotransmitters earlier

The most effective medication is the one that improves daily functioning with manageable side effects.

Onset and Dosing

Stimulants usually begin working within a few days. Many non-stimulants require several weeks. Early improvement may feel stronger at first and often reflects relief rather than tolerance or dependence.

Dose decisions should be guided by outcomes, not milligrams.

Effectiveness is best evaluated through:

- Changes in daily functioning
- Ability to initiate and complete tasks
- Emotional steadiness
- Feedback from trusted observers

Benefits of Treating ADHD

Appropriate ADHD treatment is associated with:

- Reduced risk of substance use problems
- Reduced risk of accidents
- Improved emotional regulation
- Lower overall cognitive and emotional load

Untreated ADHD is associated with higher long-term risk than treated ADHD. Prescribed ADHD medication does not increase addiction risk for most adults.

Side Effects

Most side effects are dose-related and manageable. Common side effects may include: sleep disruption, appetite changes, increased anxiety, irritability, and elevated heart rate or blood pressure.

Side effects are often addressed through dose adjustments, timing changes, or medication switches.

Rare but Serious Risks

Cardiovascular Effects

Large studies show no meaningful increase in heart attacks or strokes, with a small increase in blood pressure for some individuals.

For adults without serious heart conditions, benefits generally outweigh risks when monitoring is in place.

Psychosis

Stimulant-associated psychosis is rare. Research shows no clear causal relationship, and symptoms typically resolve after stopping medication.

Most individuals will never experience this effect.

Medication as Part of Care

Medication is most effective when combined with:

- Adequate sleep and nutrition
- Therapy or coaching
- Environmental and self-accommodation supports

Medication supports regulation. It does not replace skill-building or structural supports.

Key Points

ADHD medication is well studied and generally safe for adults.

It reduces multiple long-term risks associated with untreated ADHD.

It is optional and individualized.

It is not a moral decision.

Flourishing Women LLC

Neurodivergent-Affirming Support for Women with ADHD