What to Do for ADHD

ADHD is short for **attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder** (uh-TEN-shun DEF-uh-sit HYE-pur-ak-TIV-uh-tee dis-ORD-ur). There is no cure for ADHD yet. But there are many good treatments to help your child. As a parent, you play a big role in your child's treatment.

Making a Plan

Your child's doctor will help you make a plan for managing your child's ADHD. Most plans include:

Medicine. For most children, drugs called stimulants (STIM-yuh-lints) are safe and work well. They speed up the signals in your child's brain. This helps your child focus and can help other symptoms too.

Behavior therapy. This focuses on changing things *around* your child to help your child behave better. See "Behavior Therapy" on the second page of this handout.

Working with the school. Treatment works best when everyone works as a team. The team should include doctors, parents, teachers, caregivers, and children themselves. By law, public schools have to pay for testing and give extra help for children with ADHD or learning problems.

Medicine

Stimulant medicines are safe and help ADHD symptoms for most children. Stimulants help children focus their thoughts, like glasses help people focus their eyes. This helps children pay attention and control their behavior.

There are a few different types of stimulants. Some brand names are Adderall, Concerta, and Ritalin. Short-acting forms work quickly and are usually taken 2 to 3 times during the day. Long-acting medicines are usually taken once in the morning. There are also patches with these medicines to put on your child's skin. Your child's doctor will help you find what works best for your child.

There is a new medicine that is not a stimulant. It's brand name is Strattera. It may not work as well as stimulants. But if stimulants are not helping or are causing bad side effects, the doctor may want your child to try it.

Which Medicine Is Best for My Child?

Your child may need to try different types and doses of stimulants. Some children do well with one kind, but not another. If one stimulant doesn't work, your child's doctor may switch to a different one.

It is important for your child to have regular checkups when taking medicine. Your child's doctor needs to track how well the medicine is working. The doctor will also check for side effects and change the dose of the medicine, if needed.

What Side Effects Can Stimulants Cause?

Not all children get side effects. If they do, these are the most common:

- Not feeling hungry; losing weight
- Sleep problems
- Not wanting to be with or play with others
- Being even more active or in a bad mood as the medicine wears off (rebound effect)
- Headaches or stomachaches

Rare side effects include:

- Small, jerky movements that come and go (tics)
- Slower growth

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Behavior Therapy

Behavior therapy helps parents, teachers, and other caregivers learn better ways to relate to the child with ADHD. You will learn how to set and enforce rules. And your child will learn better ways to control his or her behavior.

Making It Work

- **Set goals.** Set clear, small goals that your child can reach. Example: Stay focused on homework for 15 minutes at a time.
- Look for **slow progress, not instant success.** Be sure your child knows it's OK to take small steps to learn self-control.
- **Find things your child can do well.** Children need to succeed to feel good about themselves.
- **Help your child stay "on task."** Use charts and checklists to track homework or chores. Keep instructions short. Offer friendly reminders.
- **Give rewards.** Give your child something nice when he or she does the right thing. (This is positive reinforcement.) It could be something simple, like 10 extra minutes of playtime.
- **Give consequences** (KAHN-suh-kwent-siz). Give your child a consequence when he or she fails to meet a goal. A consequence might be losing a privilege or not getting something he or she wants. For example, the child loses playtime for not getting homework done. (*Never* hit your child. It doesn't help.)
- **Stick with your system and watch it work!** Find rewards and consequences that work for you and your child. Then use them the same way every day.

Warning

If your child has a serious heart problem, he or she should probably not take stimulants. Check with your child's doctor.

Working With the School

Your child's school can help your child with ADHD. The school should work with you and your child's doctor.

Two federal laws say what schools must do to help:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B (IDEA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

These laws say public schools *must*:

- Pay for testing for a child with learning problems.
- Use teaching methods that meet children's learning needs.
- Give extra help when needed.

This extra help might be a classroom aide, private tutoring, special classroom settings, or even a special school. Talk with the teacher or principal if you think your child needs more help.

You may want to share the ideas below with people who work with your child at school:

- Keep assignments short or break them into sections.
- Keep an eye on the child and help him or her stay on task.
- Use clear rewards and consequences.
- Send parents daily or weekly "report cards" on the child's behavior in school.

Children with ADHD *can* do well in school when they get the help and support they need.

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at www.aap.org.

Your child's doctor will tell you to do what's best for your child. This information should not take the place of talking with your child's doctor.

Note: Brand names are for your information only. The AAP does not recommend any specific brand of drugs or products.

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