

Stimulant Medicines

An Easy-to-Read Guide
For People Who Take
These Medicines

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About Project MED

“Project MED” stands for **M**edication **E**Ducation. The Project MED Group has written a series of eight education booklets about medicines. These booklets will help you if you have learning problems, reading problems, or problems understanding why you are taking medicine. These booklets will also be useful to you if English is not your main language. Parents, guardians, and other care givers might like to read these booklets too.

Our goal was to write the information in plain words. When we cannot avoid using a hard-to-read word, we give you help in pronouncing (pronoun'-sing) the word. We also describe what the hard-to-read word means in parentheses ().

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These Medicines

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Stimulant (STIM'-yoo-lent) Medicines

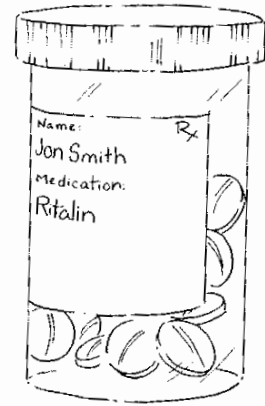
Stimulant medicines are medicines that make you more alert (uh-LERT'). They help many patients to be more aware of what is going on around them. Stimulant medicines are among the most common medicines for behavior problems in young people. They are also used in adults but not as much. In this booklet, we will tell you about the kinds of stimulant medicines. We will also talk about why they are used and what their side effects are.

Most medicines have two names – a *brand* name and a *generic* (je-NAIR'-ik) name. Brand names are names given to the medicines by the company that makes them. A medicine may have more than one brand name. Generic names describe the chemicals (KEM'-i-kuls) used to make the medicine. A medicine can have only one generic name.

Example: One stimulant medicine has the brand name of *Ritalin* (RIT'-uh-lyn) and the generic name methylphenidate (meth-il-FEH'-nih-date).

Now we will talk about the kinds of stimulant medicines. This is a good time to look at your own bottle of medicine. You need to know which medicine you are taking.

Match the name on your bottle with one of the names in the list that follows. You may want to circle the name of your medicine in this booklet.



Kinds of Stimulant Medicines

We have listed some of the stimulant medicines. We give *both* the brand names and the generic names of each medicine, since your medicine may have only one name on the bottle. The names of the most common stimulant medicines are printed in *italics*.

Stimulant Medicines

Generic Name

caffeine (in coffee, tea, or pills) }

deanol

dextroamphetamine

dextroamphetamine and amphetamine (a mix) }

magnesium pemoline

methylphenidate

Brand Name(s)

{ NoDoz, Caffedrine, Vivarin (pills);
also found in coffee, tea, and some kinds of pop.

Deaner

Dexedrine

Adderall

Cylert

{ *Ritalin*
Ritalin-SR

Right now, Ritalin, Adderall, and Dexedrine are the stimulant medicines most people take. It is not clear whether caffeine (kaf-EEN') helps people with attention problems.

What's New?

Some medicines are being tested at the time we are writing this booklet. One has the generic name d-methylphenidate, and it does not have a brand name yet. It will probably work a lot like Ritalin. Another new stimulant medicine will be tomoxetine (the-MOX'-a-teen). This medicine might work for some people who are not helped by Ritalin, Adderall, or Dexedrine.

Uses for Stimulant Medicines

1. Proven Uses

These medicines have two main proven uses.

a) Hyperactive (HI'-per-AK'-tive) Behavior

One is to reduce hyperactive (HI'-per-AK'-tive) behavior. Sometimes this problem is called **Attention** (uh-TEN'-shun) **Deficit** (DEF'-eh-sit) **Hyperactivity** (HI'-per-ak-TIV'-i-tee) **Disorder**. Sometimes it is called **ADHD** for short.

People with hyperactivity (ADHD) usually have three main problems. These are:

- attention (uh-TEN'-shun) problems – trouble listening to or looking at what is going on
- overactivity – moving around too much, wiggling in seat, running around more than normal, trouble staying still
- impulsiveness (im-PUL'-siv-ness) – acting without thinking first, suddenly doing things without thinking about them.



If you have ADHD, you may have problems with some of these things but not all of them. Most people who take stimulant medicines for ADHD are young – about 5 to 17 years old. But some adults have ADHD and use these medicines too.

b) Narcolepsy

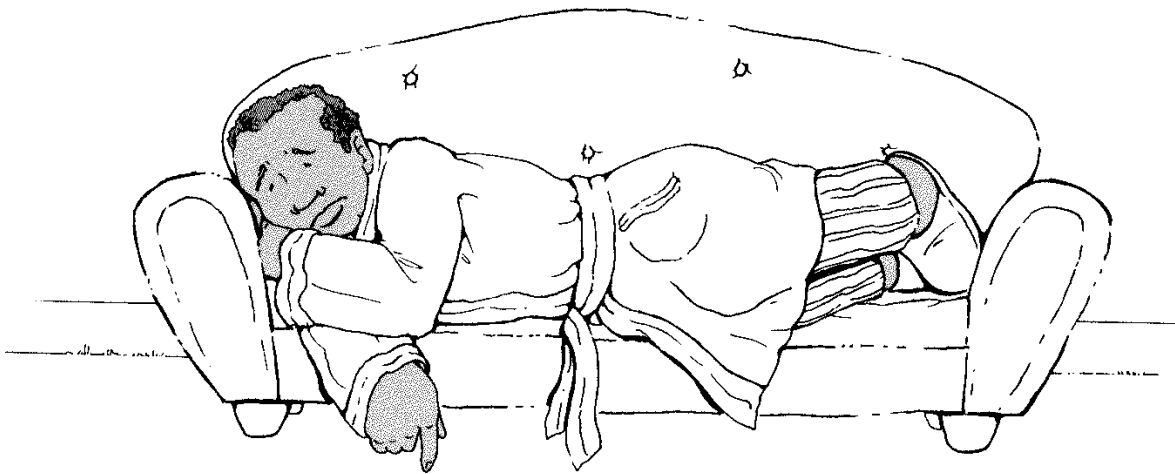
The other proven use for these medicines is to treat a problem called narcolepsy (NAR'-kuh-lep-see). People with narcolepsy have trouble staying awake when they need to be awake. They may have many little sleeps during the day. They do not want to fall asleep, but they have a hard time stopping.

2. Other Uses (Not Proven)

a) Depression

Stimulant medicines are sometimes used to help adults who have depression (de-PREH'-shun). You may have depression if you:

- feel sad or "blue" most of the time



- feel that you are no good or worthless
- don't feel like eating or eat too much most of the time

- feel tired most of the time or very nervous and shaky
- sleep too little or too much
- can't do your job as well as usual
- think about dying or hurting yourself badly
- think the future looks bad.

Antidepressant (an-tie-dee-PRESS'-ent) medicines are given to stop depression. Sometimes stimulant medicines are also used to help antidepressant medicines work better. Stimulants *and* antidepressants may work better than antidepressants alone.

b) Behavior Problems

Sometimes stimulant medicines are used to help young people who have behavior problems. They may be mean to other kids or to animals. They may tear things up or break things. They may argue a lot or break important rules. Sometimes these medicines can help these people stay out of trouble.

Side Effects

Side Effects are unplanned changes that sometimes happen when you take a medicine. Sometimes side effects are a problem. Stimulant medicines can cause side effects, but most are small ones.

1. Some Common Side effects

Most of the common side effects are not dangerous, but they may not feel nice. Stimulant medicines can:

- make you eat less. You may not be as hungry as usual.
- make it hard to fall asleep
- give you stomach (STUM'-ik) aches
- give you headaches.

Sometimes Tylenol (TYE'-len-all) or Advil will make these go away.

- make you dizzy (light-headed)
- make you feel sad or cry more than usual
- make your heart beat a little faster.



If you have any of these side effects, be sure to tell your doctor.

If you are a young person you may want to tell your parents. Then they can tell the doctor. The doctor may change the amount of the medicine or try a different medicine. The doctor may wait for a few weeks to see if the side effect goes away.

2. Other Side Effects

Stimulant medicines *may* cause other side effects that can be important.

- They may cause *tics* in a small group of patients, but this is rare. Tics are sudden jerks or muscle movements. These tics may happen in the face, the hands, or the arms. Or the tics can be noises that the person makes but does not want to: barks, grunts, dirty or cuss words, or other sounds. If this happens to you, be sure to tell your doctor right away.
- Stimulant medicines *may* slow down your growth. This is not likely unless you take big doses without breaks (like over the summer). Any changes in growing are usually very small. Usually they do not matter unless you are very small for your age or if your parents are very small.
- One stimulant medicine – Cylert (SY'-lurt) – may cause a big problem to the liver (this is rare). Signs of liver damage may be a gray color in the eyes or a yellow color to the skin. Most doctors only use Cylert if other stimulant medicines don't work for the patient. They may ask you to have blood tests to avoid this problem.

3. Bad Use of Stimulants

Some people may take very big doses of stimulants to get kind of “drunk” (also called “stoned” or “high”). This is against the law. Never let anyone else have your medicine, because they may use it to hurt themselves. Also, never take someone else’s medicine.

Doses

The “dose” is the amount of medicine you are taking. The amount of medicine you take is printed on your medicine bottle as a number with the letters *mgs*. *Mgs* stands for “milligrams” (MILL'-ih-grams). Medicines are usually measured in milligrams. The stimulant medicines differ in strength. For young people, these are common doses:

Medicine	Dose
methylphenidate (Ritalin)	5 to 20 mgs, 2-3 times a day
dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine)	2.5to 10 mgs, 2-3 times a day
Adderall	2.5to 10 mgs, 2-3 times a day
Ritalin-SR	20 – 40 mgs, 1-2 times a day

The dose may be bigger for kids over 16 years or for adults. If you want to know how big the dose is for your medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist (FAR'-ma-sist) – the person who gives you your medicine at the drugstore. Different people need different amounts of medicine. Your doctor will try to find the right dose for you.

How Often?

Most stimulant medicines work for only a short time during the day. Because of this, you may take two or more doses each day. Some children take Ritalin once, twice, or three times a day. There is one type of Ritalin that lasts for a longer period of time. It is called Ritalin-SR. Dexedrine and Adderall work longer than regular Ritalin. Usually you only need two doses of Adderall each day. Cylert works even longer. Usually it is given only in the morning. If you have trouble falling asleep, your dose may be too late in the day. Talk with your doctor about this.

Common Interactions (in-ter-AKT'-shuns)

“Interaction” means that when one medicine is taken with another, some effect is made stronger or weaker. We will describe just a *few* interactions here.

- Stimulants may increase the effects of some antidepressants, like imipramine (Tofranil) and desipramine (Norpramin). This could be bad or good. Young people may take both kinds of medicines for ADHD or for ADHD and bed wetting. Taking both could make you feel tired, dizzy, or spaced out. But, taking both may make the antidepressant work better in people with depression.
- Stimulants may increase the effects of some anticonvulsant (an-tie-kun-VUL'-sent) medicines like carbamazepine (Tegretol).
- Stimulant medicines should **never** be given with a special group of antidepressants called "MAOIs." The brand names for these medicines are: Marplan, Nardil, Deprenyl, and Parnate.
- Sometimes stimulants are given with clonidine (KLON'-ih-deen) (brand name, Catapres). Some doctors wonder if these two medicines can affect the heart when used together. **If you are taking a stimulant and Catapres, Do not stop the Catapres on your own.** Stopping all at once could cause a big problem with blood pressure. You may want to ask your doctor or pharmacist about this.



If you are taking medicines in addition to stimulants, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist if they will affect the way that the stimulant works.



How Long Will I Take This Medicine?

Most people **with ADHD** get less active (move less) as they grow older. But problems paying attention (uh-ten'-shun) and acting without thinking first may stay. Many young people with ADHD are able to stop medication when they reach their teens or when they become adults. But some find that medicine helps even when they are adults. As they get older, some people with ADHD can stop their medicine most of the

time. But they may use it on important days when they must be alert (uh-LERT') or very well behaved.

If you are taking stimulant medicine **for narcolepsy**, you may have to take it as long as you are having problems staying awake. That could be many years. It could be most of your life.

If you are taking the medicines **for depression**, you may be able to stop it after a year or two. Talk with your doctor. You may feel better, but the medicine may be *helping* you to feel better. If you just stop the medicine, you may feel OK at first, but you may feel worse later.

If you have questions about how long you will need to take this medicine, ask your doctor.

Source

Much of the information in this booklet was taken from the following book:

Reiss, S. & Aman, M. G. (1998) (Eds.). Psychotropic medicines and developmental disabilities: The international consensus handbook. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Nisonger Center. ISBN 0-9659866-0-9.

About the Series

“Project MED” (Medication **ED**ucation for Consumers) was created with funding from the U.S. Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The goal of Project MED is to provide patients with information, in a manner that they can understand, about the medications that they are taking. The booklets are designed for a broad group of people taking medications: people with mental retardation, autism, reading difficulties, severe mental illness, child and adolescent patients, and people whose first language is not English. By providing this information, we hope to increase each patient’s participation in his or her own health care.

The series consists of eight booklets. The booklets were written to provide basic information about patients’ rights and about medications in easily understood words. There are few medical or legal words, and difficult words are defined.

The eight booklets are:

1. Patients’ Rights and Responsibilities
2. Anticonvulsant Medicines (Medicines for People With Epilepsy)
3. Antipsychotic Medicines
4. Antidepressant Medicines
5. Antimanic Medicines (Medicines for People With Mood Problems)
6. Antianxiety Medicines
7. Stimulant Medicines
8. Other Medicines (Blood Pressure Medicines, Naltrexone, and Over the Counter).

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