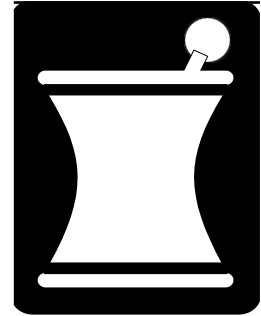


# Stimulant Medication

## Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Stimulant medicines are used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy.

When people have ADHD, they may find it difficult to concentrate, have high activity levels and act impulsively. For example, they may talk all the time, be very loud and struggle to finish their work. Methylphenidate can help to relieve these symptoms and allow people to focus and achieve more at school, work and home.



### What is a stimulant medicine?

Methylphenidate and dexamphetamine are used to treat ADHD and similar disorders. These medicines are called stimulants. This is not because they stimulate people in a way that makes them more active or energetic, rather that they stimulate the parts of the brain that help with concentration and to control impulses.

There are a number of brand names for methylphenidate including Ritalin™, Rubifen™ and Concerta™.

Ritalin™ and Rubifen™ come in short acting and long acting forms of tablets, and in a variety of doses. Concerta™ is a capsule that is long-acting but also releases some medication as soon as it is taken. Ritalin LA™ is also a long acting capsule which acts in a similar way. Methylphenidate Extended Release (Teva)™ is also similar to Concerta™.

Dexamphetamine is only available as Dexamphetamine 5mg tablets.

### Are stimulant medicines safe to take?

It is usually safe to take stimulant medicines regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn't suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to your child:

- If your child has a history of any heart problems, or if there is any family history of heart arrhythmias or high blood pressure.
- If your child or any close family members have a history of tics, anxiety or epilepsy.
- If your child has glaucoma, hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid) or a very rare condition called phaeochromocytoma.
- If your child or any close friends or relatives have problems with alcohol or drug use.
- An eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa

Methylphenidate and dexamphetamine are controlled drugs. This means that there are more restrictions around their use. They have the potential for abuse, and this is why these restrictions are in place.

If there are any concerns that the medications could be misused, your doctor will discuss with you safeguards which may need to be put in place to ensure this does not happen and to protect your child.

Methylphenidate is not recommended in pregnancy and breastfeeding.

## **How should stimulant medicines be taken and what should be done if a dose is missed?**

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Look at the label on the medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow this advice carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse. Never change your dose without consulting with your doctor. Concerta™ capsules and the SR (sustained release) tablets need to be swallowed whole: do not crush or chew them.

Concerta™ capsules and Ritalin LA™ are taken once a day. If a dose has been missed, it should be taken as soon as possible unless more than four hours have passed. Never double a dose, even if a dose has been missed. Do not increase the dose unless the doctor has advised to do this.

Some people only take the medication to cover the school days and do not take it in weekends and for school holidays.

## **What will happen when the stimulant medicine is started?**

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Some of the effects of stimulant medicines will be noticeable within the first week of taking it. To begin with, there may be small increases in your child's ability to concentrate as well as reductions in impulsivity and over-activity. The full benefit of the medicine can be expected once the ideal dose for your child has been determined and your child has had a chance to adjust to the difference in the way you are feeling.

Some people may get side effects before they start to feel significantly better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. Look at the table on the below. It tells you what to do if your child gets any of the usual side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. There are a number of other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect

## **Are there other medicines that should be avoided or taken care with?**

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Stimulant medicines, when combined with some other medicines, can cause unpleasant side effects. Some medicines should be avoided when people are taking stimulant medicines. Always consult with your doctor or pharmacist before starting a new medicine or purchasing medicines over the counter such as cough and cold preparations. Extra care is needed with epilepsy medications and antidepressants.

## How long should your child keep taking stimulant medicines?

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If your child stops taking their stimulant medicine, their original symptoms may return, however it is likely that at some stage it will be appropriate for your child to stop taking it. Most people stop these medicines by the time they finish their formal education. At least every two years the medication should be reviewed by a specialist to see if it is still appropriate. It is important to learn strategies to cope with the symptoms of ADHD and not to solely rely on medication as the only treatment strategy.

## What about alcohol and marijuana?

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It is recommended that people taking stimulant medicines do not drink alcohol, smoke marijuana or use other recreational drugs. Alcohol, marijuana and other recreational drugs can increase some of the effects of stimulant medication and increase side effects. Excessive use may result in a decision by your doctor to stop prescribing stimulant medication.

## Will using stimulant medicines increase the risk of drug abuse in later years?

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Young people with ADHD are at increased risk for alcohol and recreational drug use however the available evidence does not indicate the treatment with stimulant medicines will increase the risk of this.

**Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well. Be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.**

## Recommended websites

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- Healthinfo: [www.healthinfo.org.nz](http://www.healthinfo.org.nz)
- ADHD Support Group: [www.adhd.org.nz](http://www.adhd.org.nz)
- American Academy Facts for Families:  
[www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/facts\\_for\\_families](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/facts_for_families)
- Medsafe New Zealand: [www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/datasheet/datasheet.htm](http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/datasheet/datasheet.htm)
- NIMH: [www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics)
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists:  
[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation.aspx)

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Side Effect	What is it?	What should I do if it happens to me?
<b>Common</b>		
Nausea	Feeling sick or very rarely, being sick.	Take the medicine with food or milk
Appetite Suppression	Feeling less like eating when on the medication	Eat breakfast before the morning dose of medicine and discuss further with your doctor.
Headache	This tends to be short lived.	Discuss with your doctor.
Insomnia	Difficulty being able to sleep at night.	Discuss this with your doctor as your dose may need adjusting.
Dry Mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit) Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. It can also increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	To help prevent dental problems sip water regularly to moisten your mouth. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. Try sugar free chewing gum to stimulate saliva or discuss using an oral lubricant with your pharmacist or dentist.
<b>Rare</b>		
Growth Suppression	Difficulty gaining weight and /or height should appetite suppression occur.	Try to eat smaller meals, but more often. Take the medication after meals. Discuss with your doctor if unable to maintain a healthy weight.
Being over focused	Being quiet and staring.	This may mean the dose is too high. Discuss this with your doctor.
Feeling Tearful, Agitated or Anxious		Discuss this with your doctor. The medication may need to be adjusted or changed.
Heart Symptoms	A racing or irregular heartbeat.	Discuss this with your doctor.
Tics or Twitches	Sudden repetitive jerking movements or repetitive vocalisations.	Discuss this with your doctor.
<b>Very Rare</b>		
Allergic Reactions	A sudden onset of skin rash, itching, swelling of face, lips, and tongue, difficulty breathing.	Contact your doctor or the Emergency department immediately.