# ADHD Medication Guide for Teens and Parents

**Why might medication be recommended?**

If you have ADHD, you might struggle with attention, impulse control or hyperactivity. Medication can help manage these symptoms by improving focus and reducing restlessness. Around **80% of kids** respond well to stimulant medication. However, medication usually works best when combined with behavioural strategies, support at school, and healthy routines.

**What types of medication are used?**

- The main medicines prescribed for ADHD are called **stimulants.**
- Stimulants in Australia contain one of two medications:
  - **Methylphenidate** (Ritalin, Ritalin LA or Concerta)
  - **Dexamphetamine** (generic dexamphetamine or Vyvanse).
- Stimulants act quickly and are effective for most people.
- Doctors usually start with a low dose and slowly increase it to find the best balance between benefits and side effects.

**Short-acting vs. Long-acting:**

- **Short-acting stimulants** last about 4 hours and might need multiple doses daily.
- **Intermediate acting** like Ritalin LA lasts about 6-8 hours.
- **Long-acting options** like Concerta or Vyvanse last 10–12 hours, making them convenient for school days.

**Are there side effects?**

Common side effects include:

- Reduced appetite
- Mood changes like irritability or anxiety
- Headaches or stomach aches
- Difficulty sleeping (if the medication is taken too close to bedtime)

Most side effects improve over time or with dose adjustments. Eating balanced meals and planning snacks can help manage appetite changes.

**Monitoring and safety**

Your doctor will regularly check your:

- Height and weight to monitor growth

- Heart rate and blood pressure

- Sleep and mood changes

This helps ensure the medication is working well and remains safe. You'll likely have an initial follow up appointment 6-8 weeks after first starting medication, then follow-up appointments every 6 months once stable.

**Who prescribes these medications?**

Typically, a paediatrician or psychiatrist starts ADHD medication, though legal requirements have recently changed in NSW and general practitioners (GPs) are able to start prescribing these medications also. Once your treatment is stable, your GP can often continue prescribing, sometimes under a shared-care plan.

**How quickly does medication work?**

Stimulants usually start to show effects within hours or days. Your doctor will carefully adjust the dose over weeks to find the right amount that controls symptoms with minimal side effects.

**Are there other medication options?**

While **stimulant medications** are the most common and effective treatment for ADHD, some children and teens may need or benefit from **non-stimulant medicines**.

These are often considered when stimulants cause side effects, don't work well enough, or aren't suitable due to other health reasons.

**Atomoxetine (Strattera)**

- **What is it?**
  Atomoxetine is a non-stimulant medicine approved for treating ADHD. It works by increasing noradrenaline levels in the brain, helping with attention and impulse control.

- **How is it used?**
  Usually started at a low dose and increased gradually over several weeks. It can take 4–6 weeks to see full benefits, so patience is important.

- **Side effects:**
  Can include stomach upset, tiredness, mood swings, or changes in appetite. Regular monitoring by a doctor is important.

**Guanfacine (Intuniv)**

- **What is it?**
  Guanfacine is another non-stimulant option sometimes used for ADHD. It's a type of medication that affects receptors in the brain to improve attention and reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity.

- **How is it used?**
  It's typically started at a low dose and increased slowly. It may cause sleepiness, so it's often taken at night.

- **Side effects:**
  Sleepiness, low blood pressure, dizziness, or fatigue. Close follow-up is needed.

**Questions you can ask your doctor**

- How will this medication help me day-to-day?

- What side effects should I watch for?

- How and when should I take the medication?

- When will I have my next review?

- What should I do if the medication doesn't feel right?