

## Treating ADHD

ADHD can't be cured, but it **can** be successfully managed. Your child's doctor will work with you to develop an individualized, long-term plan.

The goal is to help a child learn to control his or her own behavior and to help families create an atmosphere in which this is most likely to happen.

In most cases, ADHD is best treated with a combination of medication and behavior therapy. Any good treatment plan will require close follow-up and monitoring, and your doctor may make adjustments along the way. Because it's important for parents to actively participate in their child's treatment plan, parent education is also considered an important part of ADHD management.

### Medications

Several different types of medications may be used to treat ADHD:

- **Stimulants** are the best-known treatments — they've been used for more than 50 years in the treatment of ADHD. Some require several doses per day, each lasting about 4 hours; some last up to 12 hours. Possible side effects include decreased appetite, stomachache, irritability, and insomnia. There's currently no evidence of long-term side effects.
- **Nonstimulants** represent a good alternative to stimulants or are sometimes used along with a stimulant to treat ADHD. The first nonstimulant was approved for treating ADHD in 2003. They may have fewer side effects than stimulants and can last up to 24 hours.
- **Antidepressants** are sometimes a treatment option; however, in 2004 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a warning that these drugs may lead to a rare increased risk of suicide in children and teens. If an antidepressant is recommended for your child, be sure to discuss these risks with your doctor.



Medications can affect kids differently, and a child may respond well to one but not another. When determining the correct treatment, the doctor might try various medications in various doses, especially if your child is being treated for ADHD along with another disorder.

## **Behavioral Therapy**

Research has shown that medications used to help curb impulsive behavior and attention difficulties are more effective when combined with behavioral therapy.

Behavioral therapy attempts to change behavior patterns by:

- reorganizing a child's home and school environment
- giving clear directions and commands
- setting up a system of consistent rewards for appropriate behaviors and negative consequences for inappropriate ones

Here are examples of behavioral strategies that may help a child with ADHD:

- **Create a routine.** Try to follow the same schedule every day, from wake-up time to bedtime. Post the schedule in a prominent place, so your child can see what's expected throughout the day and when it's time for homework, play, and chores.
- **Get organized.** Put schoolbags, clothing, and toys in the same place every day so your child will be less likely to lose them.
- **Avoid distractions.** Turn off the TV, radio, and computer games, especially when your child is doing homework.
- **Limit choices.** Offer a choice between two things (this outfit, meal, toy, etc., or that one) so that your child isn't overwhelmed and overstimulated.
- **Change your interactions with your child.** Instead of long-winded explanations and cajoling, use clear, brief directions to remind your child of responsibilities.

- **Use goals and rewards.** Use a chart to list goals and track positive behaviors, then reward your child's efforts. Be sure the goals are realistic (think baby steps rather than overnight success).
- **Discipline effectively.** Instead of yelling or spanking, use timeouts or removal of privileges as consequences for inappropriate behavior. Younger kids may simply need to be distracted or ignored until they display better behavior.
- **Help your child discover a talent.** All kids need to experience success to feel good about themselves. Finding out what your child does well — whether it's sports, art, or music — can boost social skills and self-esteem.

## Alternative Treatments

Currently, the only ADHD therapies that have been proven effective in scientific studies are medications and behavioral therapy. But your doctor may recommend additional treatments and interventions depending on your child's symptoms and needs. Some kids with ADHD, for example, may also need special educational interventions such as tutoring, occupational therapy, etc.

**Every child's needs are different.**



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**For additional information, contact your child's doctor or school nurse.**