

MEDICATION INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Stimulants

_____	is taking	_____
Patient's name		Medication

Doctor's name		
If you have any questions about this medicine, please call		
_____		_____
		Name
_____		_____
Telephone during business hours		Telephone for emergencies at other times

General Information About Medication

Each child and adolescent is different. No one has exactly the same combination of medical and psychological problems. It is a good idea to talk with your child's doctor about the reasons a medicine is being used.

It is very important that the medicine be taken exactly as the doctor instructs. However, everyone forgets to give a medicine on time once in a while. It is a good idea to ask the doctor in advance what to do if this happens. Do not stop or change a medicine without asking the doctor first.

If the medicine seems to stop working, it may be because it is not being taken regularly. Your child may be "cheeking" or hiding the medicine or forgetting to take it (especially at school). The doses may be too far apart, or your child may need a different dose. Something at school, at home, or in the neighborhood may be upsetting your child, or your child may need special help for learning disabilities or tutoring. Please discuss your concerns with your child's doctor. **Do not just increase the dose!**

All medicines should be kept out of the reach of children and should be supervised by an adult. If someone takes too much of a medicine, call your child's doctor, the poison control center, or a hospital emergency room.

Each medicine has a "generic" or chemical name. Just like laundry detergents or paper towels, some medicines are sold by more than one company under different brand names. The same medicine may be available under a generic name and several brand names. The generic medications are usually less expensive than the brand name ones. The generic medications have the same chemical formula, but they may or may not be exactly the same strength as the brand-name medications. Also, some brands of pills contain dye that can cause allergic reactions. It is a good idea to talk to your child's doctor and the pharmacist about whether it is important to use a specific brand of medicine.

All medicines can cause an allergic reaction. Examples are hives, itching, rashes, swelling, and trouble breathing. Even a tiny amount of a medicine can cause a reaction in patients who are

allergic to that medicine. Be *sure* to talk to your child’s doctor before restarting a medicine that has caused an allergic reaction.

Taking more than one medicine at the same time may cause more side effects, or one of the medicines may not work as well. Always ask your child’s doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before adding another medicine, either prescription or over-the-counter. Be sure that each doctor knows about all of the medicines your child is taking. Also tell the doctor about any vitamins, herbal medicines, or diet supplements your child may be taking. Some of these may have side effects alone or when taken along with medication.

Everyone taking medicine should have a physical examination at least once a year.

If you suspect your child is using drugs or alcohol, please tell the doctor right away.

Pregnancy requires special care in the use of medicine. Please tell the doctor immediately if you suspect your child is pregnant.

Printed information like this applies to children and adolescents in general. If you have questions about the medicine, or if you notice anything unusual, please ask your child’s doctor or nurse. As scientific research advances, knowledge increases and advice changes. Even experts don’t always agree. Many medicines have not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for use in children. For this reason, use for a particular problem or age group often is not listed in the *Physicians’ Desk Reference*. This does not necessarily mean that the medicine is dangerous or does not work, only that the company that makes the medicine has not applied for permission to advertise the medicine for use in children. Usually this is because it is expensive to do the tests needed to apply for approval for use in children.

What Are Stimulants?

The medicine your child is taking is called a *stimulant*. It helps part of the brain (“the brakes”) work better. These medicines help your child pay attention, stay calm, and follow instructions. The most commonly used types of stimulant medicine are listed below:

Brand name	Generic name
Ritalin	methylphenidate
Ritalin-SR (sustained-release)	methylphenidate
Ritalin LA (long-acting)	methylphenidate
Metadate CD (controlled delivery; long-acting)*	methylphenidate
Metadate ER (extended-release)	methylphenidate
Methylin	methylphenidate
Methylin ER (extended-release)	methylphenidate
Concerta (very long-acting)	methylphenidate
Focalin	dexmethylphenidate
Dexedrine, DextroStat, Dexedrine Spansule (long-acting)	dextroamphetamine
Adderall, Adderall XR (long-acting)	mixture of amphetamines
Cylert (long-acting), PemADD (chewable)	pemoline

*Comes in 30-pill blister pack.

Pemoline (Cylert and PemADD) is now rarely used because of the risk (very rare) of liver damage and the need for blood tests.

How Can These Medicines Help?

Stimulants can improve attention span, decrease distractibility, increase the ability to finish things, improve the ability to follow directions, decrease hyperactivity, and improve the ability to think before acting (decrease impulsivity). Handwriting and completion of schoolwork and homework can improve. Fighting and stubbornness in youngsters with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can decrease.

Children with ADHD may need not only medicine but also special help in school and behavioral modification at home and at school. Some youngsters and families also benefit from family or group therapy. If stimulant medicines do not help, or if they cause too many side effects, your child's doctor may suggest other medicines.

Stimulants also are used to help people with narcolepsy (sudden and uncontrollable episodes of deep sleep) to stay awake.

How Do These Medicines Work?

In people who have ADHD, these medicines stimulate parts of the brain that are not working as well as they should. An example would be the part that controls impulsive actions ("the brakes"). These medicines are not tranquilizers or sedatives. They work in the same way in children and adults and in people with or without ADHD.

How Long Do These Medicines Last?

The effects of Ritalin, Methylin, Focalin, Dexedrine, and Adderall usually last 3–4 hours. Symptoms may return in the late morning or late in the day. The longer-acting medicines, such as Ritalin-SR tablets, Metadate CD capsules, Metadate ER or Methylin ER tablets, and Dexedrine Spansules have effects that last as long as 6–8 hours. The effects of Concerta and Adderall XR may last up to 12 hours.

How Will the Doctor Monitor These Medicines?

The doctor will review your child's medical history and physical examination before starting a stimulant medication. Your child's doctor or nurse will check height, weight, pulse rate, and blood pressure before starting the medicine and occasionally thereafter. When Cylert or PemADD is used, blood is drawn to check the liver before starting the medicine and regularly afterward.

The doctor will ask for regular reports from you and your child's teacher(s) to monitor learning and behavior. After the medicine is started, the doctor will want to have regular appointments with your child to monitor progress, to adjust the dose, to watch for side effects, and to evaluate whether other treatments are needed.

What Side Effects Can These Medicines Have?

Any medicine can have side effects, including an allergy to the medicine. Because each patient is different, the doctor will monitor your child closely, especially when the medicine is started. Your child's doctor will work with you to increase the positive effects and decrease the negative effects of the medicine. Please tell the doctor if any of the following side effects appear or if you think that the medicine is causing any other problem. (Not all of the rare or unusual side effects are listed.)

Common Side Effects

If the following side effects do not go away after about 2 weeks, ask the doctor about lowering your child's dose:

- Lack of appetite and weight loss (encourage your child to eat a good breakfast and afternoon and evening snacks; give medicine during or after meals)
- Insomnia (this may be the ADHD coming back and not a side effect; changing the time or dose of medicine, starting a bedtime routine, or adding another medicine may help)
- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Irritability, crankiness, crying, emotional sensitivity
- Loss of interest in friends
- Staring into space
- Rapid pulse rate or increased blood pressure

Less Common Side Effects

Tell the doctor within a week or two if your child experiences any of the following side effects:

- Rebound (as the medicine is wearing off, hyperactivity or bad mood may get worse than before the medicine was taken; the doctor can make adjustments to help this problem)
- Slowing of growth (this is why your child's height and weight are checked regularly; growth usually catches up if the medicine is stopped or the dose is decreased)
- Nervous habits (such as picking at skin)
- Stuttering

Serious, Rare Side Effects

Call the doctor within a day if your child experiences any of the following side effects:

- Motor or vocal tics (fast, repeated movements or sounds) or muscle twitches (jerking movements) of parts of the body
- Sadness that lasts more than a few days
- Auditory, visual, or tactile hallucinations (hearing, seeing, or feeling things that are not there)
- Any behavior that is very unusual for your child
- Yellowing of skin or eyes, dark urine, or pale bowel movements (pemoline only)

What Could Happen if These Medicines Are Stopped Suddenly?

No medical withdrawal effects occur if stimulants are stopped suddenly. Some people may experience irritability, trouble sleeping, or increased hyperactivity for a day or two if they have been taking the medicine every day for a long time, especially at high doses. It may be better to decrease the medicine slowly (taper) over a week or so.

How Long Will These Medicines Be Needed?

There is no way to know how long a person will need to take these medicines. The parent(s), the doctor, and the school will work together to determine what is right for each child. Sometimes the medicine is needed for a few years, but some people may need to take medicine even as adults.

What Else Should I Know About These Medicines?

Many people have incorrect information about stimulants. If you hear anything that worries you, please check with your doctor.

Stimulants do not *cause* illegal drug use or addiction. However, because the patient or other people may abuse these medicines, adult supervision is especially important. Also, the government has special rules for how much of this medicine may be prescribed at one time and how soon prescriptions must be filled after they are written.

Some young people take the medicine three or four times a day, every day. Others need to take it only once or twice a day, only on school days. You and your child's doctor will work out what is best.

It is important not to chew any of the long-acting tablets or capsules because this releases too much medicine all at once. Empty Concerta shells will pass through the digestive system and may be seen in bowel movements. This is harmless. If someone has trouble swallowing, Concerta may stick in the throat. The Metadate CD capsule may be opened and the tiny beads inside “sprinkled” onto applesauce for children who cannot swallow pills.

If the medicine seems to stop working, it may be because it is not being taken regularly. Your child may be “cheeking” or hiding the medicine or forgetting to take it (especially at school). The doses may be too far apart, or your child may need a different dose. Something at school, at home, or in the neighborhood may be upsetting your child, or your child may need special help for learning disabilities or tutoring. Please discuss your concerns with your child's doctor. **Do not just increase the dose!**

The combination of stimulants with antidepressants such as Tofranil (imipramine) may cause irritability and confusion or severe emotional and behavioral problems (such as hallucinations and fighting). However, at times the two medicines may be used together, *very carefully*.

It is not a good idea to combine stimulants with nasal decongestants (such as pseudoephedrine) because rapid pulse rate or high blood pressure may develop. If a stuffy nose is really troublesome, it is better to use a nasal spray. Check with the pharmacist before giving an over-the-counter medicine. Also, many children with ADHD become cranky or more hyperactive while taking antihistamines (such as Benadryl). If medicine for allergies is needed, ask your child's doctor.

