

How is ADHD Treated?

Treatment for ADHD should always include multiple elements and approaches. The first element of treatment should always be education about ADHD for caregivers, other family members, and individuals affected by ADHD. Studies have shown that providing education on ADHD greatly increases the chance that individuals will continue with their treatment long term. Along with education, best practices in treating ADHD include: regular follow-up visits with a medical practitioner, continued support for families with information about ADHD and its management, patient, parent and teacher training, special educational accommodations, and behavioral interventions, along with medication if required. Additional treatments such as cognitive behaviour therapy, ADHD coaching, tutoring, counseling, and most recently mindfulness have been shown to also be beneficial especially when combined with medication. It needs to be noted that not all people with ADHD require medication. It is often the type of symptoms displayed and the level of their impairment that dictates this. When required, medication can often have a significant impact on symptom control.

In uncomplicated cases of ADHD, medication management is fairly straightforward and typically effective with minimal side effects. The medications that are most often used to manage ADHD symptoms are classified as stimulant medication, however non-stimulant medications are now also available. Stimulant medications have been around for more than fifty years with thousands of research studies indicating their safety and effectiveness. However, as with all medications, even over the counter products, side effects may occur. Therefore, routine follow-up visits with a physician are always advised to assess the level of effectiveness and occurrence of side effects. Immediate contact with the prescribing physician is recommended if side effects are significant. Ask your physician to explain which side effects are common or short-term and which need to be taken seriously. Often a change in dose or switching to another medication can alleviate side effects.

The development of time released or once-a-day medications, both stimulant and non-stimulant, have significantly improved the quality of life of many children and adults with ADHD. These new medications are more difficult to abuse, reduce the stigma of having to take medication in front of others, prevent gaps in symptom relief and decrease the chance of exaggerated rebound symptoms happening several times a day. As with all medication, reaching the highest level of effectiveness with the fewest side effects is always the aim of treatment. Building a strong working relationship with your practitioner is the key.

Studies have shown that while treating ADHD symptoms with medication alone, doctors are now able to improve many of the symptoms of ADHD in a short period of time. However, a multi-modal approach is more effective and always recommended. Medication treatment or indeed any currently known ADHD treatment does not cure ADHD. The goal of ADHD treatment is to decrease impairing symptoms and to use strategies and accommodations to improve daily life functioning.

For information on medication treatment approved in Canada please access [First Line](#) and [Second Line](#) ADHD medications.