psychiatryUK

ADHD medication

Who can safely start treatment?

A guide for patients

If you are waiting for an ADHD assessment, or have already been diagnosed with ADHD, you may be considering medication as one of the treatment options available to you.

Many people can take ADHD medication safely and find it helpful.

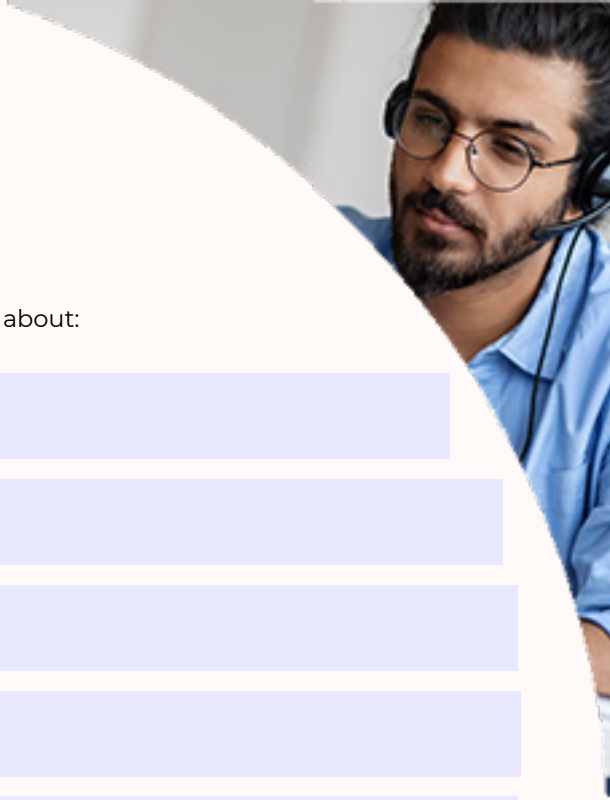
Before starting medication, we need to check that it's safe and appropriate for you. This leaflet explains the main things we look at before treatment begins.

Please try not to worry when reading this. **Most people are able to start ADHD medication safely**. If something on this leaflet applies to you, it does not always mean you can never have treatment. It may simply mean we need more information, specialist advice, or to consider a different type of medication.

Why do we check eligibility?

ADHD medications can affect things such as heart rate, blood pressure, appetite, sleep, mood and, for some people, other medical conditions.

Our role is to make sure medication is started safely and only when the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks.



Before treatment starts, we may ask about:

1. Your physical health.
2. Your mental health.
3. Any current medications.
4. Alcohol or drug use.
5. Pregnancy.
6. Your weight, blood pressure and pulse.
7. Any specialist care you are currently under.

When ADHD medication may not be safe to start

There are some situations where we may not be able to start ADHD medication straight away.

This is usually because a condition is **active, uncontrolled, unstable, or could be made worse by medication**.

Heart and circulatory conditions

We may not be able to start ADHD medication if you have certain significant heart or circulation conditions, including:

1. Serious heart rhythm problems, such as atrial fibrillation, ventricular tachycardia or Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome. *Please note that if you have had an ablation procedure to cure this we may be able to go ahead but your clinician will need to request additional information from your specialist.*
2. Heart failure.
3. Previous heart attack.
4. Moderate or severe ischaemic heart disease.
5. Angina.
6. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.
7. Severe heart valve disease. *Please note that if you have had a heart valve replacement, further information will be required from your specialist.*
8. Uncontrolled high blood pressure.
9. Uncontrolled tachycardia.

Neurological conditions

ADHD medication may not be suitable if you have certain neurological conditions. These include:

1. Ischaemic stroke. *Please note that if you've had another form of stroke, such as a bleed affecting your brain, we may be able to go ahead but would need to obtain more information from your specialist.*
2. Poorly controlled grand mal epilepsy. *You must not have had a seizure within the last six months*
3. Brain aneurysm.
4. Cerebral arteriovenous malformation.

Other physical health conditions

ADHD medications may not be safe to start if you have:

1. Poorly controlled benign intracranial hypertension.
2. Untreated closed-angle glaucoma.
3. Uncontrolled open-angle glaucoma.
4. Uncontrolled hyperthyroidism.
5. End-stage renal failure.

6. A BMI under 17. Please note that if your BMI is under 18.5, we will need evidence that this BMI between 17 and 18.5 is normal for you and that you have not had an eating disorder.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health.

We may not be able to start ADHD medication straight away if you are currently experiencing:

1. High suicidal risk.
2. Serious ongoing self-harm.
3. An eating disorder that is not well controlled.
4. Uncontrolled psychosis.
5. Uncontrolled mania.

This does not mean you are being refused care. It means we need to make sure you are safe and supported before starting a medication that could affect your mood, appetite, sleep or emotional stability.



Alcohol, drugs and medical interactions

We may not be able to start ADHD medication if there is ongoing use of illicit drugs, alcohol dependence, or heavy alcohol use.

This is because ADHD medication may be less safe in these situations, and there can be additional risks around side effects, misuse, dependence or interactions.

For more detailed information, please read our guide: Alcohol, Recreational Drugs and ADHD Medication.

We will also review your current medications. If you take two or more medicines that increase the risk of a condition called 'serotonin syndrome', you may be asked to reduce these before ADHD medication can start. Your clinician will discuss this with you.

Pregnancy

We would not usually start ADHD medication during pregnancy.

If you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or unsure whether you might be pregnant, please let your clinician know so they can discuss the safest options with you.

Please read our guide: **ADHD, Medication and Pregnancy.**



When stimulants may not be suitable

Some people can still have ADHD medication, but stimulant medicines may not be the safest option.

In these cases, your clinician may discuss a non-stimulant medication such as atomoxetine.

The best treatment choice depends on your health history, current symptoms, risks and preferences.

What happens if something on this leaflet applies to me?

Please do not panic. It does not automatically mean treatment is impossible.

Depending on your situation, we may:

1. Ask for more information from you.
2. Ask for information from your GP or specialist.
3. Wait until a condition is better controlled.
4. Discuss non-stimulant treatment options.
5. Take advice from the wider clinical team.
6. Recommend a different treatment plan.

The aim is always to help you access treatment as safely as possible.

What should I do before my appointment?

It can be helpful to have the following information ready:

1. A list of your current medications.
2. Details of any heart, neurological or serious physical health conditions.
3. Details of any current mental health concerns.
4. Your current height and weight, if known.
5. Any recent blood pressure or pulse readings, if available.
6. Details of any specialist doctors involved in your care.



A final reassurance

ADHD medication is safe and effective for many people. These checks are not here to exclude people unnecessarily. They are here to make sure treatment is started safely, carefully and in the way that is right for you.

If you are unsure whether anything in this leaflet applies to you, please discuss it with your clinician. They will talk it through with you and help decide the safest next step.





How to get in touch

If you have any queries abour the information in this leaflet, please contact our patient support team via **Live Chat** or by telephone: **0330 124 1980 (Mon-Fri 8am-6pm)**.