

Prescribing Guidelines for Stimulants for ADHD^{1,2,3}

- Treatment involves addressing underlying neurologic dysfunctions, concomitant behavioral manifestations, learning disabilities, comorbid disorders, and psychosocial issues.
- Stimulant medications are first-line treatments, but should not be given in the absence of other interventions, including education, counseling, and classroom modifications.
- Stimulant treatment should be considered only for patients with moderate to severe impairment in two different settings.
- A physical examination (including a baseline blood pressure, pulse, height, and weight) should be done before prescribing stimulants. Children should have these vital signs checked annually, adults should have blood pressure and pulse checked quarterly.
- Stimulants have been linked to sudden death and serious cardiovascular events and are contraindicated in patients with structural cardiac abnormalities.
- The use of stimulants is contraindicated in patients with glaucoma, symptomatic cardiovascular disease, hyperthyroidism, and hypertension.
- Stimulants may exacerbate symptoms of behavior disturbance and thought disorder in patients with pre-existing psychotic disorder.
- When side effects occur they are usually short-lived and respond to dose or timing adjustments.
- In general, polypharmacy should be avoided, although in some cases combining medications may be needed.
- Occasional medication-free trials may be useful to assess the need for continued pharmacological treatment.
- Medication goals:
 - Have minimal adverse effects
 - Improve a variety of symptoms
 - Address comorbidities and abuse potential
 - Provide even coverage throughout the day
 - Target dopaminergic and/or noradrenergic systems.

These guidelines are not intended to replace a practitioner's clinical judgment. They are designed to provide information and to assist practitioners with decisions regarding care. The guidelines are not intended to define a standard of care or exclusive course of treatment. Health care practitioners using these guidelines are responsible for considering their patient's particular situation in evaluating the appropriateness of these guidelines.

¹ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. www.aacap.org. Practice Parameter for the Use of Stimulant Medications in the Treatment of Children, Adolescents and Adults.

²Magellan Health Services. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Clinical Practice Guideline. 2005.

³ Gold Standard: Clinical Pharmacology 2006. www.clinicalpharmacology.com