



## New Options for ADHD

The distractibility and restlessness caused by this condition can interfere with learning and derail jobs and relationships. But the symptoms of ADHD are treatable

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Sept. 22 issue - Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder isn't just about rambunctious boys wreaking havoc in the back of first-grade classrooms. ADHD also may affect quiet, daydreaming girls and adults of both sexes. The distractibility and restlessness caused by this condition can interfere with learning and derail jobs and relationships. But the symptoms of ADHD are treatable. Doctors discovered during the 1930s that Benzedrine (an amphetamine) helped improve the behavior of hyperactive kids. Studies have since shown that other amphetamine stimulants (Dexedrine and Adderall) and methylphenidate (Ritalin and Concerta) can work equally well.

The biggest problem with these medications was their lack of flexibility. In their original forms, the stimulants required repeated dosing during the day and didn't provide smooth, continuous effects. But the range of options has expanded over the past five years. Methylphenidate and the amphetamines now come in various short- and long-acting forms (chart). A particular medicine may work well for one child, but not so well for another. For kids who don't respond well to stimulants, or who are likely to abuse them, a recently approved medicine called Strattera offers a non-stimulant option for managing ADHD. This medicine must be taken daily—not just as needed—and should be swallowed whole, not crushed. Like an antidepressant, it can take several weeks to produce optimal effects. Because it is so new, the jury is out on its long-term safety and efficacy.

If your child struggles with ADHD, how can you find the best medicine? We start by asking the following questions:

How many hours of relief are needed? Some medications last three to four hours, others eight to 12 hours, and the newest medication lasts all day. Most ADHD patients benefit from medication that covers all the waking hours, not just the school hours, and many continue their treatment on weekends as well as weekdays.

### Tailoring the Treatment

Stimulants are still the most common remedy, but they now come in a variety of short-and long-acting formulations.

Generic Name	Brand Name	Hours it Lasts	Can Be Crushed or Split
Methylphenidate	Ritalin®	3-4	Yes
	Ritalin SR®	4-8	No
	Metadate ER®	4-8	No
	Metadate CD®	8-10	Yes
	Concerta®	8-12	No
	Ritalin LA®	8-12	Yes
Amphetamine	Focalin®	4-6	Not studied
	Dexedrine Tablet	3-5	Yes
	Dexedrine Spansule	6-8	Yes
	Adderall® tablet	4-6	Yes
	Adderall XR®	10-12	Yes

Can this child swallow a pill? Several preparations can be crushed or opened and sprinkled onto food, while others must be swallowed whole.

Are the benefits optimal and the side effects tolerable? Most children will experience substantial improvement in their ADHD symptoms with minimal side effects. If not, maybe the dose is wrong or another medicine would work better. Finding the best choice can take some trial and error, but medication options for treating ADHD have never been better.

*From Children's Hospital Boston and Harvard Medical School. For more health information from Harvard Medical School, visit [health.harvard.edu](http://health.harvard.edu).*

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