



## Stimulant Medication- Patient's Frequently Asked Questions

### *Why stimulant medication?*

- ADHD is a chemistry problem.
- Stimulants can improve the brain's chemistry for attention. Just as insulin corrects blood sugar chemistry in diabetics, stimulant medication improves the brain's neurotransmitter activity in ADHD patients.
- When treating diabetes the goal is normal blood sugar and ADHD treatment seeks to normalize attention.
- Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry recommend stimulants as the treatment of choice for patients with ADHD.

### *Which medication?*

- There are no good or bad ADHD medications.
- The experience of others on a particular medication doesn't predict how you will respond.
- All of the medications have similar actions and side effects but the effect on each individual brain varies widely.
- As the genetics and types of ADHD are better understood it will be easier to predict which medication will be optimal.
- We follow a medication plan that is designed to find the right dose of the right medication with as few steps as possible.

### *How much medication?*

- A plan of careful medication adjustments will find the dose that is best for the individual patient.
- Size, weight and age have nothing to do with the dose of medication.
- Medication effect is usually determined by how well the individual absorbs and metabolizes that particular medication.

### *What do you mean by 'dose optimization'?*

- Our goal is self-control. Right now *ADHD has you*. **We want to use medication to control the ADHD, not you.** That way, *you have ADHD* controlled.
- The goal is not to have the your overly focused. We are using the medication more like a prescription supplement than medication. We are trying to get the brain chemistry normalized so that you have **normal attention** like glasses give you normal vision—not laser vision!
- Over medication can make you overly focused and very productive. At first you may find this desirable!



- In the long run you'll prefer a dose of medication that allows you to feel normally attentive. When this occurs you may still get distracted at times, bored or restless, everyone does!

***What kind of changes should I expect to see?***

- Stimulant medication generally works the day it is taken so the effect is immediate.
- You should notice better concentration, improved ability to complete tasks and to listen to and remember what is said to you.
- Self-control may improve so that you are less likely to interrupt or get impatient or frustrated.
- You may feel calmer because of decrease in hyperactive behavior and thinking.

***What's a good rule of thumb for when to expect things to change?***

- We like the 2/7 rule:

2 days to see if the medication is working

2 weeks to 2 months to see if side effects will go away

7 days per week that you should take your medication

***What If I don't see a change in my behavior?***

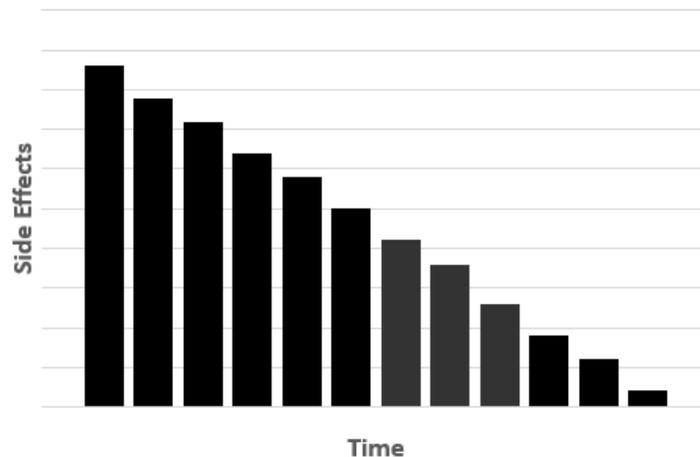
- If no change is noted after the second day an increase in dose is indicated.
- The process of finding the optimal dose will sometimes require weeks to months and may involve short-term side effects.
- This compares to having high and low blood sugars when adjusting insulin dose in a diabetic.
- Patience and willingness to try different medications and doses are the two biggest contributions patients can make to the process.

***How will I know if there is a problem with the medication?***

- We don't want to change your personality. We understand that no one wants to turn into a Zombie version of him/herself! If after several days on the medication you feel flat, boring, robotic and this doesn't improve please let us know.
- The most common medication side effects are listed in a chart alongside advice on what to do if you experience them.

**What else can you tell me about side effects?**

- Side effects go down with time.
- Taking medication 7 days a week is almost always associated with fewer side effects.
- If side effects don't go down with time then we'll need to change the medication or the dose.
- Remember that all medications have side effects. We hear so many horror stories about stimulant medication that we sometimes accept that side effects are part of the deal when treating ADHD. It doesn't have to be so. We will work with you to minimize and eliminate side effects.



**Why do you recommend taking medication 7 days a week?**

- We find that patients who take medication daily have fewer side effects after the first 2 weeks. It seems when you don't take medication daily you reboot the side effects every Monday. We call this Recycling Side Effects.
- If you need 'a break' from the medication then we feel that it is not the right medication or dose. You shouldn't need a break from improved self-control. There are about 180 school days and about 250 workdays in a year. We don't want you on a medication that adversely affects your personality for half the year or more!
- ADHD affects so much more than school or work. 'I can handle it at home and on the weekends' is not what diabetics say about high blood sugar. Relationships with siblings, parents, friends and even getting in and out of the bathtub are affected by ADHD.
- Recent studies have demonstrated that accidents, ER visits for trauma; automobile accidents and traffic violations are more common when ADHD patients are without medication. ADHD isn't kid stuff!

***What else do I need to know?***

- Stimulant medications are Class II controlled substances like some narcotics because they carry the potential to be abused. It is illegal for anyone other than the patient for whom they are prescribed to take this medication.
- Stimulant prescriptions CANNOT be called in or faxed to the pharmacy. You must have an original prescription to present to the pharmacist. You can pick up your prescription at the office or it can be mailed to your home address. We cannot mail them to the pharmacy.
- Please allow 24 hours when asking for a prescription, longer if we need to mail it.

**LONG TERM USE OF STIMULANT MEDICATION**

***Will I have to be on these medications forever?***

- ADHD is a lifespan disorder and until recently we didn't understand how much it affects patients in adulthood.
- There do appear to be adults in whom the brain develops connections that decrease ADHD symptoms. A recent MIT study demonstrated structural brain changes in adults whose ADHD symptoms improved over time. There is emerging evidence that medication treatment may increase the odds of this improvement.
- Careful follow up & discussion with your Focus-MD provider will help you select the right time for a trial off of medication to see if function has improved over time.

***Are there problems taking ADHD medication over the long term?***

- Stimulant medications used to treat ADHD have a long-standing record of safety.
- Over 30 years of medical studies and patient experience have confirmed that when used correctly the medications are effective and safe.
- The long-term risks of medication are outlined in the Product Information of the medication's package insert.

***Are there specific concerns about long-term stimulant use?***

- **Is there a risk to the heart?** The AHA, APA, AAP, FDA all conclude that there is little evidence that stimulants contribute cardiac problems and ironically if there are problems it is usually when decreasing dose. Be sure to tell your Focus-MD provider if you have a heart condition of any kind such as a murmur or irregular heart beat or if a family member has had sudden unexplained death or sudden cardiac related death. The medications are known to increase heart rate and blood pressure in some but not all patients. Cardiovascular status will be monitored closely at follow up visits.

- **Does the medicine cause growth problems?** Patients starting treatment in adolescence or adulthood generally do not see significant changes in weight. Starting medication in the teen years will not affect final adult height.
- **What about Addiction?** The package insert warns that methylphenidate and amphetamines can cause dependence but studies actually show less addiction and drug abuse in ADHD patients treated with stimulant medication from childhood. Stimulants started in adolescence and adulthood seem to have no positive or negative effect on substance use.

***What are the long-term benefits of stimulant medication?***

- Improves academic outcomes
- Improves Executive Function over months/treatment of treatment—helps patients become more self sufficient
- Improves self-esteem
- Decreases anxiety and depression generally though some patients with co-occurring mood, anxiety or obsessive symptoms may see increased symptoms.
- Decreases accidents