



## ADHD: Medication

*Attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADHD) is a neurological condition that can lead to problems with regulating thoughts (inattention), movements (restlessness), behaviours (impulsivity) and emotions (emotional over-reactivity).*

ADHD affects from 5% to 8% of children and 4% of adults. Canada and Québec have developed guidelines for assessing and treating ADHD. Treating ADHD starts with confirming the diagnosis. Understanding what ADHD is helps apply effective personalized coping strategies (see the section TIPS: [www.cliniquefocus.com](http://www.cliniquefocus.com) and [www.attentiondeficit-info.com](http://www.attentiondeficit-info.com)). Joining an ADHD support group is often extremely helpful. For targeted problems, specific therapy with specialized professionals (e.g., psychologists, psychoeducators, occupational therapists, coaches) can be very useful.

If your ADHD symptoms remain troublesome, your doctor may suggest that you take medication or follow a treatment plan. Medication acts a little like a pair of biological eyeglasses by improving your brain's ability to focus (see the ADHD video and other informations, in the Medication section and read the suggested book "My Brain Still needs Glasses"). NB: ADHD medication must always be taken under a doctor's supervision following diagnostic procedures and confirmation that such treatment is indicated.

Standard pharmacotherapy involves taking a psychostimulant or a non-stimulant medication. The doses are gradually adjusted under medical supervision. When the right dose has been achieved, clinical response occurs within a few days for psychostimulants and within one to two weeks for non-stimulants. Some products are short-acting; others act all day.



**CLINIQUE FOCUS**

[cliniquefocus.com](http://cliniquefocus.com) / [attentiondeficit-info.com](http://attentiondeficit-info.com)

Developed by Clinique FOCUS under the coordination of Dr. Annick Vincent (Revised: July 2014)

*All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce this material is granted for non-commercial purposes only.*

When people with ADHD take a medication that helps them, it is important to try to coordinate the times when it is most effective with those when ADHD has a functional impact. Here is the average duration of action for the ADHD medications available in Canada:

ADHD Medication	Duration of action
Amphetamine-based products	
Dexedrine tablet	3 to 4 hours
Dexedrine spansules:	6 to 8 hours
AdderallXR	12 hours
Vyvanse	13 to 14 hours
Methylphenidate-based products	
Ritalin	3 to 4 hours
Biphentin	10 to 12 hours
Concerta	10 to 12 hours
Non-stimulants	
Strattera	Effects lasting up to 24 hours
Intuniv XR*	Effects lasting up to 24 hours

*\*Intuniv XR was approved by Health Canada in July 2013 for the treatment of ADHD in children aged 6 to 12 years either as single therapy or as adjuvant therapy in combination with psychostimulants that provide a sub-optimal response when used alone.*

ADHD medications have been shown to be effective. An individualized approach must be applied. Some people have a better therapeutic response with one product over another. Their clinical profile does not help predict which will be the most effective.

These medications are generally well tolerated. It is important to be aware of their potential side effects and to know how to manage them (see the infosheet “Management of Side Effects,” in the TIPS section: [www.cliniquefocus.com](http://www.cliniquefocus.com) and [www.attentiondeficit-info.com](http://www.attentiondeficit-info.com)). *Don’t get discouraged: it may take a couple of tries before finding the right medication and the right dose.*



## Did You Know?

- ❖ To minimize missed doses, medication distribution devices such as Dispill or pill boxes are useful and practical.
- ❖ Many athletes have ADHD and some of them must take medication. Given that these products may boost concentration and alertness, they are classed as controlled drugs. In Canada, athletes who compete at national and international levels who take psychostimulants or non-stimulants must check if they need to receive authorization from the Canadian Council for Ethics in Sport (CCES, [www.cces.ca](http://www.cces.ca)).
- ❖ Some treatments, such as methylphenidate in the form of a skin patch or an oral suspension, are available in the United States but not in Canada. Other medications are sometimes used to treat ADHD. These approaches are beyond the intent of a general document like this one.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your planned treatments, including over-the-counter products such as nutritional supplements.

For further information on ADHD medications, check the following:

- Table of ADHD Medications
- Our infosheet called “Management of Side Effects”  
*[www.cliniquefocus.com](http://www.cliniquefocus.com) and [www.attentiondeficit-info.com](http://www.attentiondeficit-info.com)*
- Videos on ADHD medication and the management of side effects  
*Video section: [www.attentiondeficit-info.com](http://www.attentiondeficit-info.com).*
- The article on pharmacotherapy published in the August 2013 edition of the journal *Le Médecin du Québec*
- Québec’s practice guidelines on ADHD
- CADDRA practice guidelines on ADHD
- Section on medication in the book *My Brain Still Needs Glasses* (Annick Vincent, 2013, Quebec Livres)

