Treatment Effectiveness for ADHD

by NEWLIFEOUTLOOK TEAM

Are Stimulants Effective and Are There Any Alternatives?

If you suspect your child may have ADHD, or if your child has recently been diagnosed with ADHD, you may wonder just how effective standard front-line treatments are. As you likely know, stimulant medications are the most common treatment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Approximately 60 percent of children with ADHD are given one methylphenidate or amphetamine stimulant. While these drugs cannot cure ADHD, they can provide symptom relief and help children with the condition lead more productive lives, with fewer distractions and disruptions.

But just how effective are these drugs? And are there any alternative treatments with proven efficacy? You must educate yourself on the facts and options available to you before you decide on a course of treatment.

The Effectiveness of Stimulant Medications for ADHD Treatment

It may seem counterintuitive to treat a hyperactivity disorder with a stimulant drug, but methylphenidate and amphetamines work because they help create the proper brain chemistry equilibrium in children with ADHD. Many researchers believe that ADHD symptoms are the result of deficiencies in certain brain chemicals, particularly dopamine. The drugs used to treat ADHD encourage dopamine production and inhibit its reuptake, thus closing the brain chemistry gap and providing relief from symptoms.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 70 and 80 percent of children with ADHD respond positively to treatment with stimulant medications. However, the degree to which these drugs provide symptom relief can vary significantly from patient to patient, and it is certainly worth noting that 20 to 30 percent of children with ADHD will require alternative treatment options because the stimulant drugs will not have the desired effect.

In such cases, your child's doctor may recommend one of the following drugs:

- **Atomoxetine.** This drug is a selective norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI). In some patients, low norepinephrine levels (as opposed to low dopamine levels) may be the problem. If this is the case with your child, this drug should provide symptom relief.
- **Antidepressants.** These drugs are usually used to treat mood disorders in adults, but because they also affect brain chemistry, they have been clinically proven to help ADHD patients who do not respond to stimulants. Examples of antidepressants that may be prescribed include guanfacine, desipramine and bupropion.

Your doctor may also recommend these drugs if your child experiences severe side effects from stimulant medications, or if your child is unable to take stimulants because of an underlying or comorbid health condition. However, you should note that these drugs have lower overall success rates than stimulants, which is the reason

stimulants have become the front-line treatment for ADHD.

Alternative Remedies for ADHD

Though there are limited studies to support their effectiveness, there is anecdotal evidence that supports some alternative treatments for ADHD. These treatments include:

- Reduced-sugar diets.
- Diets high in omega fatty acids.
- Exercise.
- Meditation and/or yoga.
- Neurofeedback training.

In the end, how you choose to treat your child’s ADHD is up to you and your child. Stimulants are often effective, but they are not the only option available and you should discuss all possibilities with your partner, your child and your child’s doctor before arriving at a decision.