

Methylphenidate



What is it used for?

Methylphenidate is a licensed treatment for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and is one of the medication treatments recommended by National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE). ADHD is a neurobiological disorder characterised by the following behaviours or core symptoms; hyperactivity, impulsivity and poor concentration. Methylphenidate can help the child's ability to concentrate and to reduce over-activity and impulsive behaviours. Treatment with Methylphenidate should be started by a specialist (child and adolescent psychiatrist or paediatrician with expertise in ADHD). Continued prescribing of the drug can be done by the GP under 'shared care' arrangements with the specialist centre.

Methylphenidate is available in short-acting/immediate release forms, 'Medikinet' and 'Ritalin'. They all work in the same way, but are made by different manufacturers. These drugs need to be taken in repeated doses during the day.

There are also long-acting Methylphenidate preparations 'Equasym XL', 'Medikinet XL' and 'Concerta XL'. These drugs are taken once daily in the morning and continue working throughout the day.

How does it work?

Methylphenidate is a stimulant drug. It is not clear exactly how the drug works in ADHD. It seems to help to increase concentration span, reduce impulsiveness, over activity and associated behavioural problems.

How should I give it?

It should be taken as instructed by your specialist. This usually means taking it once or twice daily. Your doctor will choose the right dose for your child. It is important for your child to take their treatment exactly as prescribed by the specialist.

You should take it at regular times each day. Taking the tablets at meal times may make it easier to remember as there is no problem about taking Methylphenidate with or after food. The longer acting



preparations 'Equasym XL', 'Medikinet XL' and 'Concerta XL' should be swallowed whole, and not chewed or broken up. (Equasym XL - the capsule can also be opened and the contents sprinkled on apple sauce).

As Methylphenidate is a stimulant, it is best not to take any doses after 4pm in the afternoon, as this might otherwise cause lack of sleep.

How long will it take to work?

The effect of a single tablet will occur within a matter of minutes or hours. Some improvement is usually seen very quickly, but Methylphenidate should be taken regularly to get an optimum effect. If there is no apparent effect within a week or two on a reasonable dose, it is unlikely the drug will help.

How long will my child need to keep taking it for?

You should talk about this with your specialist or doctor as people respond differently. Children usually need to take Methylphenidate for some time after it has been started. If it works, your child may need to take Methylphenidate for quite a long time.

Should you stop taking it periodically?

Methylphenidate should be taken every day, including weekends, unless your specialist doctor or nurse has advised you not to.

What should I do if I forget to give it?

For the short-acting preparations, if you remember within two hours of when the dose was due, then give the missed dose (unless it is after 4pm in the afternoon, see the previous page). Otherwise, start again when you remember. Do not give two doses at the same time to 'catch up'. This might produce more side effects and upset your child.

The long acting preparations are given once a day, and should not be given later than mid-morning.



What sort of side effects might occur?

The main side effects (if they occur) are nervousness or irritability, lack of sleep, lack of appetite and feeling sick or stomach ache. These can often be reduced by changing the dose or changing the times of the doses.

Specialists and parents/carers should keep an eye on the child's growth (height and weight). Sometimes growth may slow down if the appetite is reduced, although your child will still catch up to the height they would have done. Taking Methylphenidate after meals sometimes helps reduce its effect on the appetite. Less often, side effects such as skin rash can occur.

Will it make my child drowsy?

This is unlikely as the drug is a stimulant, but it can happen in very few children.

Will it cause my child to put on weight?

Again, this is unlikely, as many children will have a reduced appetite.

Are there any foods or drinks that my child should avoid?

There are no known problems with food or drink with Methylphenidate.

Will it affect my child's other medication?

Some anticonvulsants such as phenytoin, phenobarbitone and primidone, some anticoagulants and some blood pressure treatments may be affected by Methylphenidate. Always make sure your hospital specialist, GP or pharmacist knows what other drugs your child is taking.

If my child is on the contraceptive pill, how will it be affected?

There are no known problems with the contraceptive pill, however like most medications in pregnancy, Methylphenidate requires the specialist and GP to be informed for immediate review, and in most cases medication will need to be stopped.



How will the treatment be monitored?

The specialist service doctor or nurse will see your child every few months, and ensure there are checks on your child's height, weight, blood pressure and pulse, as well as check on emotional and social progress.

Will my child need blood tests?

It is not considered necessary to do routine blood tests whilst a person is taking Methylphenidate.

16. Useful websites

NICE: www.nice.org.uk

MIND: www.mind.org.uk/informationfactsheets

The Royal College of Psychiatrists: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info

