

Medication

Preview

Making the decision to take ADHD medication can be hard, as there is so much, sometimes conflicting, information out there. Whether you decide to take medication or not, my hope is that you make an informed decision based on accurate information.

The questions, brief content overview and resource recommendations below will help you on your journey to making the best decision for yourself.

Current Understanding

Taking a brief inventory of your current knowledge and questions about ADHD medication can help you decide if you need more information or help in making a decision regarding medication.

Below are a few questions to help get you started.

1. Medication to treat ADHD can or does (if you are currently taking it) help me in the following ways:

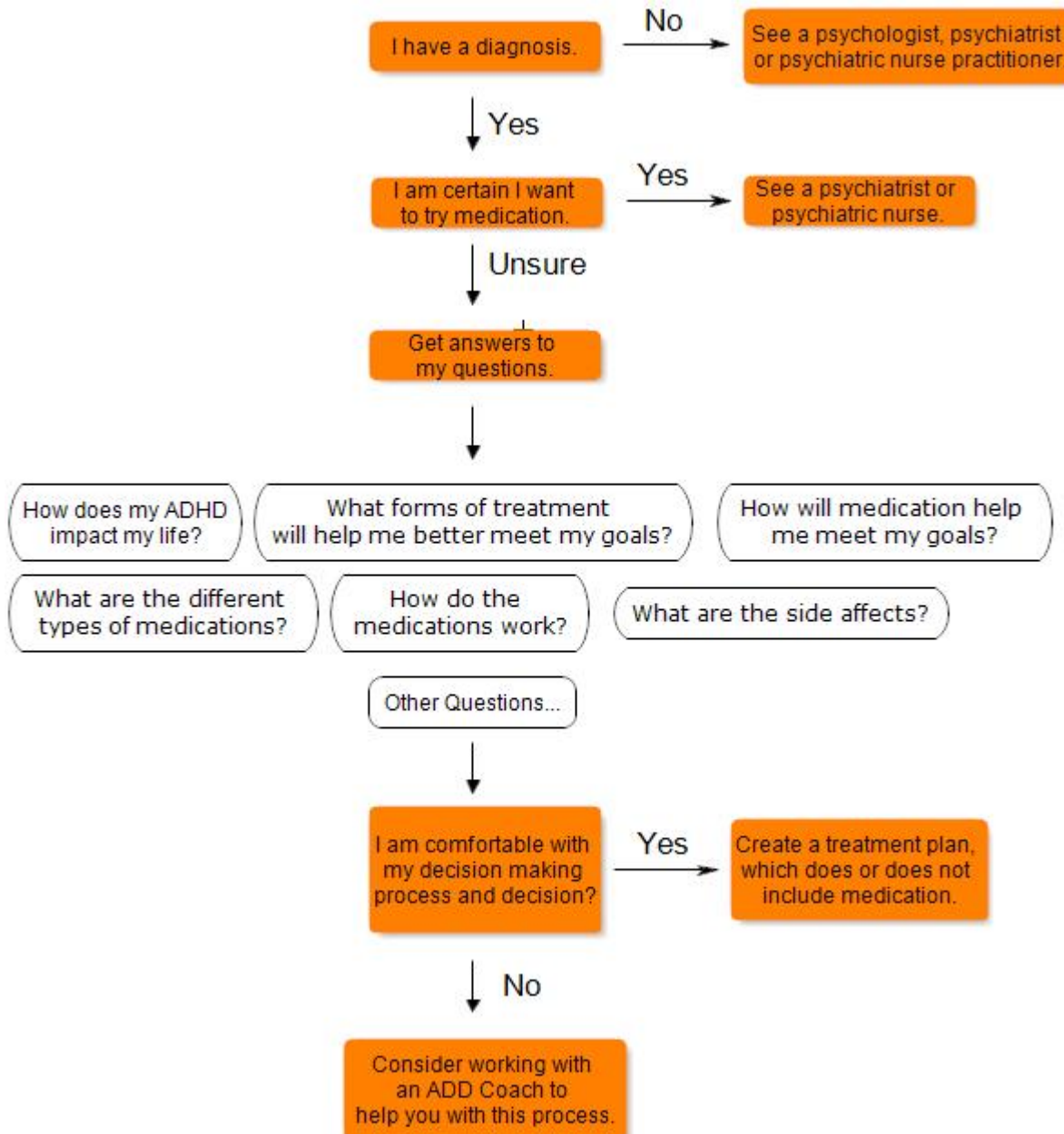
2. I have the following questions or concerns regarding ADHD medication:

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3. The following are the resources (people, books, internet...) I can use to find out answers to my questions:

Decision Making Process

By using the step by step process below you can **minimize the confusion and overwhelm** you may feel when attempting to arrive at a decision that works for you. Though, admittedly, the process may feel lengthy, you will ultimately arrive at a more satisfactory answer if you take your time and do not rush.



Diagnosis

For an **evaluation**, it is best to see a **psychologist, psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner**.

These professionals are trained in the field and are the most qualified to make a diagnosis. The advantage of seeing a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner for evaluation is that they can also prescribe medication, if a need is indicated by the evaluation.

If you have not yet received a diagnosis from a psychologist, psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner, I would suggest going back one step before considering taking ADHD medication.

You may be tempted to consult with your family doctor, as the process can seem easier and quicker. And some family doctors may be willing to diagnose and prescribe medication for mental health issues.

But I strongly caution against seeing your family doctor for advice or evaluation for any suspected mental health issue, including ADHD. They likely do not have the necessary specialized knowledge and also do not keep current in the field.

This lack of expertise can result in delays in receiving the correct diagnosis and treatment plan for ADHD or any other mental health issue. Consequently, the process may be longer and your ability to move effectively and efficiently toward your goals may be severely compromised.

However, your family doctor may be able to help you by making an appropriate referral.

Knowing Your Objective

Once you receive the diagnosis and are ready to explore treatment options to manage your ADHD, you have many decisions to make. One decision is whether to take medication or not. It is not an easy decision, and there is no right or wrong answer.

Knowing what you **hope to achieve** by taking medication is the first step in the process.

Take a minute to answer the following questions to gain some clarity about this. (If you find it difficult to answer the any of the questions, that is likely an indication that you need to do more research or the help of a professional to answer your questions.)

1. I think taking medication will help me in the following ways:

2. I'm not exactly sure how medication will help me, and need to find more answers by accessing the following resources (professionals, books, internet):

3. If I decide to take medication, I think I will also need to make the following types of changes and use the following types of support to achieve the results I want:

Stimulant Medication Overview

Stimulant medication, while not the only type of medication used to treat ADHD, is the **most common type**.

As Dr. Russell Barkley notes,

“... among the treatments that results in the greatest degree of improvement in the symptoms of the disorder, research overwhelmingly supports the use of the stimulant medications for this disorder.”ⁱ

And for the 70% - 80% of adults with ADHD for whom stimulant medication is affective, the main benefit is that it serves to **correct a biochemical condition in the brain that interferes with attention and impulse control**. Simply, stimulants serve to allow for adequate amounts of the necessary neurotransmitters, particularly dopamine and norepinephrine.

While the medication is active in your system it may help by minimizing the impact of your ADHD symptoms, even though the symptoms remain. That is, medication can help you:

- be better able to more consistently use the skills and strategies you already know.
- make choices in the moment that are more in sync with your values and long term goals.
- be better able to learn new skills, strategies and information related to your various professional and personal goals.

As Dr. Thomas Brown, author of *Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults*, explains:

“...increased dopamine in the synapse can act almost as a kind of ‘Viagra’ to encourage the brain’s response to the task. Thus [stimulants] may counter the chronic problem with motivating oneself to do necessary, but not intrinsically interesting tasks.”

If you are not living up to your potential and you would like to operate more effectively in the various domains of your life, then medication may be an option for you.

Yet, while medication can form the **cornerstone of an effective treatment plan** for many with ADHD, some may eschew it because of what they have heard in the media or from friends and family members.

How Do I Feel About ADHD Medication?

No doubt, using medication to treat ADHD has gotten a bad rap. And I bet your decision to take medication or not may be affected by some of this hearsay, like the comments below.

- *People – kids – are over medicated.*
- *They just want to take the easy way out; they just need to try harder.*
- *Everyone has ADD, should they all take drugs?*
- *If only they ate better and had less sugar in their diet.*

Your opinion about ADHD medication, whether based on fact or not, will likely impact your decisions around medication.

Take a minute to be clear about your perspective by answering the following questions.

1. When I think about ADHD medication, the following beliefs comes to mind:

2. If I took ADHD medication, I might feel (describe how you might feel about yourself):

3. I think the following aspects of my opinion are possibly based on hearsay (I need to confirm or debunk them):

4. I think the following aspects of my opinion are based on accurate information:

Remember, ADHD is a neurological condition in which you lack a sufficient amount of certain neurotransmitters. Simply put, medication just fills in the gaps and levels the playing field.

Really, taking medication for ADHD is no different than taking insulin for diabetes or wearing glasses for poor eye sight.

If you don't think you have accurate or enough information about ADHD and / or ADHD medication to make an informed decision, I would encourage you to **explore** some of the recommended **resources** at the end of the module, as well as **speak to professionals** whom you trust.

But, please don't base your decision on what you hear in the general media or from your cousin Tillie.

If You Decide to Take Medication...

It is important, if you decide to take medication, that you do so under the **guidance of a prescriber**, who has expertise in ADHD medication, such as a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner.

As with the evaluation needed to diagnose ADHD, the understanding needed to prescribe the right medication to treat ADHD is far too complex for a generalist, like your family doctor.

As I noted before, this process may be lengthy. It may take time to find the right prescriber. And once you find the right prescriber, determining the right medication for you may entail some degree of trial and error.

So, you may find yourself questioning whether it is worth the time and effort.

If you find yourself wavering, answer the following questions to see if you want to continue trying.

1. If I decide not to take medication, are other forms of treatment for my ADHD sufficient to help me reach my goals? What are they?

2. If other forms of treatment are not sufficient, how might medication help me?

3. Knowing that figuring out the right medication might take not be quick, how much time and effort am I willing to commit to the process? Be specific.

When You First Take Medication

When you first get your prescription it is important to have a specific **plan** in place for **follow-up** with your prescriber in order to monitor the effectiveness and possible side effects of the medicine.

It is often the case with ADHD medication that you will need to adjust the dosage and possibly the type of medication before you have the right one. For these reasons, be sure that you and your prescribing practitioner have agreed on a follow up plan.

So that you can work with your prescriber in adjusting your medication in the beginning, it is helpful to use a medication log. If your prescriber does not give you one, you can access two different types by following these links: [Daily Medication Log](#), [Weekly Medication Log](#). Both will be helpful, so choose whichever one you prefer.

Need More Information

While the above information gave you a taste of some of the issues you may encounter as you make your decision regarding medication, you likely will want more information.

In addition to your doctor, the resources below, which are both **reputable** and **accessible**, are great places to get started.

Attitude Mag - [ADHD Medication & Treatment Information](#)

National Resource Center on ADHD (A Program of CHADD) - [Medication Management](#)

The Limits of Medication

Yes, this module is about medication.

But it would not be complete without acknowledging that using medication as the only form of treatment for your ADHD is not sufficient by itself to address the challenges of ADHD.

In fact, it may not be effective, if it is the only intervention. Medication cannot teach skills and strategies, heal past hurts from the impact of ADHD or offer support and accountability.

While medication may form the cornerstone of your treatment plan, it is usually most effective when it is **part of a holistic treatment plan**, which may also include:

- skill building around areas, such as time and task management
- education about ADHD and its impact
- awareness and use of strengths
- exercise
- proper diet
- enough sleep
- quality connections with others
- a mindfulness practice
- therapy
- ADD Coaching
- tools
- other forms of treatment

So, if you decide to take medication to manage your ADHD, you will still need to incorporate other forms of treatment, as well.

Conclusion

The decision to take medication is a very personal one, and there is no right or wrong answer.

I hope that you will stick with the process until you arrive at an answer that feels right for you.

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Barkely, Russell, [Fact Sheet: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\) Topics](#)