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Adderall

Adderall is a medication containing mixed amphetamine salts—specifically amphetamine and dextroamphetamine—that act as central nervous system stimulants. It is primarily prescribed to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy, helping improve focus, alertness, and impulse control. Owing to its stimulant effects, Adderall carries significant potential for misuse and dependence.

Key facts

- **Generic name:** Amphetamine and dextroamphetamine
- **Drug class:** Central nervous system stimulant
- **Common formulations:** Immediate-release tablets; extended-release capsules (Adderall XR)
- **Controlled substance:** Schedule II (high potential for abuse)
- **Approved uses:** ADHD and narcolepsy

How it works

Adderall increases the levels of neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain, enhancing neural activity in regions that regulate attention, motivation, and arousal. Dopamine influences reward and concentration, while norepinephrine heightens alertness and focus. The extended-release form maintains these effects for 10–12 hours, whereas the immediate-release version lasts about 4–8 hours.

Therapeutic uses

For individuals with ADHD, Adderall improves attention span and decreases impulsivity and hyperactivity. In narcolepsy, it helps promote wakefulness and reduce excessive daytime sleepiness. Both forms are typically part of a broader treatment plan that may include behavioral therapy or counseling.

Risks and side effects

Common side effects include insomnia, decreased appetite, dry mouth, headache, stomach pain, and elevated heart rate. More serious reactions may involve heart attack, stroke, psychosis, seizures, or slowed growth in children. Because it can increase blood pressure and heart rate, Adderall is contraindicated in people with certain cardiovascular or psychiatric conditions.

Misuse and dependence

Adderall has a boxed warning from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for its high risk of misuse, dependence, and addiction. Nonmedical use—such as taking higher doses or using it without a prescription—can cause severe cardiovascular and psychological harm, and abrupt discontinuation may trigger withdrawal symptoms including fatigue and depression.