



Fact Sheet for Parents: What You Need to Know About Adderall

Aaron Hunt, Gabriela Murza, and Alyssa Ferrin

What Is Adderall?

Adderall is a prescription medication used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy (a sleep disorder) (American Addiction Centers, 2024; National Cancer Institute, n.d.). It is a stimulant, which increases brain activity to help with focus, attention, and impulse control (Shoar et al., 2023). Adderall contains two main ingredients: amphetamine and dextroamphetamine (Food and Drug Administration, 2007).

Why Is Adderall Dangerous When Misused?

Adderall can be addictive, especially when taken without a prescription or in higher doses than prescribed (Caron Staff, n.d.). Kids and teens are at higher risk because their brains are still developing (Abrams, 2024). Misusing Adderall can cause serious heart issues, including increased heart rate, high blood pressure, and in severe cases, heart attacks or strokes (Geoffrion, 2024; Caron Staff, n.d.).

Adderall misuse can also lead to anxiety, paranoia, and other mental health problems (American Addiction Centers, 2024; Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, n.d.). It can also worsen existing conditions like depression (Caron Staff, n.d.). Because Adderall is a stimulant, it can cause feelings of invincibility, leading to risky behaviors like driving recklessly or experimenting with other drugs (Abrams, 2024).

Teens and young adults who purchase Adderall from the internet and/or through social media referrals (Moyle et al., 2019) may end up with deadly versions of Adderall tainted with fentanyl or other drugs, like methamphetamine (Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA], 2021). These counterfeit pills often appear

Highlights

- Adderall is a prescription stimulant to treat ADHD and narcolepsy.
- Misusing Adderall can cause serious issues, from heart problems and mental health issues to reckless and risky behaviors.
- Purchasing Adderall illegally can be deadly, as versions may be tainted with fentanyl or other substances.
- Talk to your children about prescription misuse.
- If someone in your home uses Adderall, monitor its use and watch for signs of misuse.

identical to legitimate pills, leaving the users unaware of how dangerous and deadly they might be (Figure 1; DEA, n.d.).



Figure 1. Side-By-Side Comparison of Authentic and Fake Adderall Pills

Source: DEA, n.d.

Myths About Adderall

These common misconceptions may lead teens and young adults to misuse Adderall (Connecticut Clearinghouse, 2011; Summit Detox, n.d.)

- **“Adderall is safe because it’s a prescription drug.”** Adderall is safe only when taken as prescribed by a doctor. Misusing it is dangerous and can lead to addiction and other serious health issues (Figure 2).
- **“Adderall will help me study better.”** While Adderall can help people with ADHD focus, taking it without a prescription doesn’t make you smarter. It can actually make it harder to concentrate and think clearly.
- **“Everyone takes Adderall to do better in school.”** Not everyone misuses Adderall. Using it without a prescription is illegal and harmful to your health.

How to Talk to Your Kids About Adderall

Explain what Adderall is and why it can be dangerous if misused. Let your kids know that taking prescription drugs like Adderall without a prescription is illegal and harmful, and they should only take it if prescribed by a doctor. Make sure your kids feel comfortable talking to you if they have questions about Adderall or feel pressure to use it (Partnership to End Addiction, 2023).



Figure 2. Common Side Effects of ADHD Medication

What Can Parents Do?

If a doctor prescribes Adderall for someone in your home, keep it in a secure place, inaccessible to kids and teens. Monitor the medication to ensure none is missing. According to the Cleveland Clinic (n.d.), signs that your child may be misusing Adderall include:

- Sudden weight loss.
- Changes in mood.
- Hyperactivity.
- Staying up all night to study or work.

Encourage your kids to develop good study habits, such as setting a schedule, taking breaks, and getting enough sleep instead of relying on substances to perform better.

Resources for Help

If you're worried that your child might be misusing Adderall, speak with a healthcare provider. They can provide advice, support, and connect you with local resources. Additionally, websites like the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) national helpline](#) have valuable information and tools to help prevent and address prescription drug misuse.

References

- Abrams, Z. (2024, March 1). *More teens than ever are overdosing. Psychologists are leading new approaches to combat youth substance misuse*. American Psychological Association.
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/03/new-approaches-youth-substance-misuse>
- American Addiction Centers. (2024, August 23). *Adderall side effects, risks & dangers of use*. American Addiction Centers. <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/stimulants/amphetamine/adderall/side-effects>
- Caron Staff. (n.d.). *What does Adderall do to your brain?* Caron Treatment Centers.
<https://www.caron.org/blog/what-does-adderall-do-to-your-brain-it-depends>
- Cleveland Clinic. (n.d.). *ADHD medications*. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/11766-adhd-medication>
- Connecticut Clearinghouse. (2011). *5 myths about ADHD drugs*. Connecticut Center for Prevention, Wellness, and Recovery.
https://www.ctclearinghouse.org/Content/www/topics/5_Myths_ADHD_Drugs.pdf
- Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). (2021). *Counterfeit pills* [Fact sheet].
<https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Counterfeit%20Pills%20fact%20SHEET-5-13-21-FINAL.pdf>
- DEA. (n.d.). *One pill can kill*. <https://www.dea.gov/onepill>
- Food and Drug Administration. (2007, March). *ADDERALL (CII)* [Medication guide].
https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2007/011522s040lbl.pdf

Geoffrion, L. (2024, July 31). *Adderall effects, risks, and dangers: Short and long term*. American Addiction Centers. <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/stimulants/amphetamine/adderall/long-term-effects>

Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. (n.d.). *The facts about Adderall addiction*. <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/addiction/adderall-symptoms>

Moyle, L., Childs, A., Coomber, R., & Barratt, M. J. (2019). #Drugsforsale: An exploration of the use of social media and encrypted messaging apps to supply and access drugs. *International Journal on Drug Policy*, 63, 101–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2018.08.005>

National Cancer Institute. (n.d.). *Adderall*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/adderall>

Partnership to End Addiction. (2023, September). *Prevention tips for every age*. <https://drugfree.org/article/prevention-tips-for-every-age/>

Shoar, N. S., Marwaha, R., & Molla, M. (2023, May 23). *Dextroamphetamine-amphetamine*. StatPearls, National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507808/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (n.d.). *SAMHSA's national helpline*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

Summit Detox. (n.d.). *Adderall addiction: 5 myths about Adderall addiction*. <https://www.summitdetox.com/blog/adderall-addiction/>

In its programs and activities, including in admissions and employment, Utah State University does not discriminate or tolerate [discrimination](#), including harassment, based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, status as a protected veteran, or any other status protected by University policy, Title IX, or any other federal, state, or local law. Utah State University is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination including harassment in employment including in hiring, promotion, transfer, or termination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, status as a protected veteran, or any other status protected by University policy or any other federal, state, or local law. Utah State University does not discriminate in its housing offerings and will treat all persons fairly and equally without regard to race, color, religion, sex, familial status, disability, national origin, source of income, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Additionally, the University endeavors to provide reasonable accommodations when necessary and to ensure equal access to qualified persons with disabilities. The following office has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the application of Title IX and its implementing regulations and/or USU's non-discrimination policies: The Office of Equity in Distance Education, Room 400, Logan, Utah, titleix@usu.edu, 435-797-1266. For further information regarding non-discrimination, please visit equity.usu.edu, or contact: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 800-421-3481, ocr@ed.gov or U.S. Department of Education, Denver Regional Office, 303-844-5695 ocr.denver@ed.gov. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Kenneth L. White, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.

November 2024
Utah State University Extension



Suggested citation:

Hunt, A., Murza, G., & Ferrin, A. (2024, November). *Fact sheet for parents: What you need to know about Adderall*. Utah State University Extension.