

Unlicensed treatment for adults

Why am I being prescribed medication that is not licensed for adults?

ADHD can continue into adulthood, although it was once thought to affect only children. Despite this, many ADHD medications are still only licensed for use in children, and some patient information leaflets may not yet reflect current guidance or clinical practice.

This can feel confusing, but it does not mean that the medication is unsafe or inappropriate for adults.

What do NICE guidelines recommend?

In the UK, guidance from the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) recommends several medication treatments for adults with ADHD.

These include:

Methylphenidate

- 1 This is usually recommended as the first-line treatment. It includes a range of formulations, such as Xaggitin XL, Concerta XL, Medikinet XL, Equasym XL, and short-release methylphenidate.

Lisdexamfetamine

- 2 This may be recommended if methylphenidate is not effective or is not well tolerated.

Dexamfetamine

- 3 This may be recommended if lisdexamfetamine is not tolerated, for example because its effects last too long.

Atomoxetine

- 4 This may be used for people who are not clinically suitable for stimulant medication, cannot tolerate stimulants, or where there is a concern about misuse.

What does 'unlicensed' or 'off-label' use mean?

Although these medications are commonly used in adults with ADHD, some are not officially licensed for this age group. When a medication is prescribed in this way, it is known as unlicensed or off-label use.

The medication is being prescribed based on clinical guidance.

- 1 Unlicensed use means that the medication is not officially approved for a specific age group or condition, but it is still prescribed based on clinical judgement, national guidance and evidence of benefit.

There is evidence to support its use.

- 2 The safety and effectiveness of these medications for adults with ADHD are supported by clinical research and by experience from routine clinical practice.

Where can I find out more?

For more information, please visit the [Choice and Medication website](#) and search for the [factsheet on unlicensed medication](#).

