

Kids diagnosed with ADHD often don't take medication regularly

3 February 2020, by Bridie Byrne



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Children diagnosed with ADHD inconsistently take their prescribed medication, going without treatment 40 percent of the time, a new study has found.

The [research](#), led by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and published in *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, shows the average [medication](#) coverage, the total time on drug between the first and the last redeemed prescription, was just 60 percent.

Lead author and MCRI Associate Professor Daryl Efron said medication use was relatively high in the first few months, then progressively decreased, only increasing again after five or six years of treatment.

Additionally, children from socially disadvantaged families who were prescribed ADHD medication were less likely to consistently take it.

"We know low socio economic families can find it more difficult to attend medical appointments, with factors including appointment costs, transport difficulties and missed work all potentially

contributing," he said.

The study showed the average medication coverage was 81 percent in the first 90 days dropping to 54 percent after 90 days.

Associate Professor Efron said little had been known about the longer term adherence to medication by children with ADHD until now.

"About 90 percent of children with ADHD respond well to at least one of the stimulant ADHD medications," he said.

"ADHD is a chronic condition and so there is a strong argument that treatment should be provided consistently for several years in most cases. But adherence with ADHD medications is often inconsistent."

The study of 3,537 children looked at all redeemed ADHD prescriptions of the three frontline treatments, methylphenidate, dexamphetamine, and atomoxetine, by participants in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

The study found that 166 children (3.6 percent) had ever redeemed a prescription for an ADHD medication. Boys were four times more likely to be prescribed ADHD medication than girls.

Associate Professor Efron said the findings have important clinical implications.

About one in 20 children in Australia has ADHD, according to ADHD Australia.

"Effort should be made to continue to engage [children](#) who stop taking medications and their families to ensure they are able to access appropriate interventions, which may include medication alongside other interventions such as [mental health](#) and educational supports," Associate Professor Efron said.

More information: Daryl Efron et al. Patterns of long-term ADHD medication use in Australian children, *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2020).
[DOI: 10.1136/archdischild-2019-317997](https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2019-317997)

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research
Institute

APA citation: Kids diagnosed with ADHD often don't take medication regularly (2020, February 3) retrieved 1 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-02-kids-adhd-dont-medication-regularly.html>

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