

Atomoxetine (say: at-o-mocks-e-teen) for parents and carers

What is atomoxetine used for?

- Atomoxetine (also called Strattera®) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
- It is made as capsules and a liquid (4mg in 1ml).

- For ADHD, about 1 in 2 (50%) of children's symptoms improve with atomoxetine over 3 months
- Carrying on for six months can improve that to about 65% (2 in 3 people)
- There are other options after that e.g. other medicines and therapies.

What is the usual dose of atomoxetine?

- The usual dose of atomoxetine is around 40-80mg a day for children under 18.

How should my child take atomoxetine?

- Swallow the capsules with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing – this makes sure they reach the stomach and do not stick in your child's throat
- For the liquid please read the leaflet that comes with the bottle on how to use the oral syringe
- It can be taken with or after food.

When should my child take atomoxetine?

- If the label says to take it once a day this is usually best in the morning
- If the label says twice a day then this is usually best in the morning and then late afternoon or early evening.

What are the alternatives to atomoxetine?

- There are other medicines (e.g. methylphenidate, lisdexamfetamine) and non-medicine treatments for ADHD.

- See our "Handy chart" for ADHD to help you compare the medicines available
- This will help you talk to your prescriber, nurse, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

How long will atomoxetine take to work?

- It normally takes about a week to start to work
- The effect then builds over the next 2-3 months.

How long will my child need to keep taking atomoxetine for?

- Your child will usually need to keep taking atomoxetine for several years. It works much better if taken regularly for at least 2 years.
- You should review this with your child's doctor every 12 months or so.

Is atomoxetine addictive and can my child stop taking it suddenly?

- Atomoxetine is not a stimulant and not addictive
- If you stop suddenly, the symptoms can return
- This may occur some weeks or even months after atomoxetine has been stopped
- Your child should come off it by a gradual drop in the dose over several weeks
- It normally works out much better stopping medication in a planned way at a time when stress levels are lower, rather than e.g. around exams or life events
- Discuss this with your prescriber, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

See our handy fact sheet on 'Coming off Medicines'

What should I do if my child forgets to take a dose of atomoxetine at the right time?

- Give the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 4-6 hours of the next dose
- If you remember after this just give the next dose as normal
- Do not try to catch up by giving two doses at once as your child may get more side effects.

If your child has problems remembering doses (many people do) talk to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse. There are some special packs and devices that can help them remember.

Will it affect my child's other medication?

Atomoxetine has a few possible interactions with other medicines. The main ones include:

- Decongestants (can be bought over the counter such as pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine (often found in cold remedies) should not be taken without consulting your pharmacist or doctor
- Atomoxetine may interact with salbutamol tablets (for asthma) but not usually with salbutamol inhalers and some antidepressants
- There is no problem with the 'Contraceptive Pill'.
- Medicines which increase serotonin may up the risk of developing Serotonin Syndrome. Seek help from a healthcare professional if your child feels very dizzy or sick, becomes hot and has muscle twitches.

See the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for the full possible list. Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but **must** follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

Are there any extra problems if my child drinks alcohol while taking atomoxetine??

- Alcohol, in moderation, does not seem to interact or clash with atomoxetine
- But be aware that someone with ADHD is more likely to drink heavily.

Will my child need any blood or other tests if he or she is taking atomoxetine?

- Your child should not need any blood tests
- Your child should have his or her blood pressure and pulse checked before they start atomoxetine
- They should also be checked every six months and after every dose change.

What about pregnancy?

- Discuss this with your health professional - there are leaflets to help you make choices

- Many gradually reduce their dose before trying to get pregnant
- If you find yourself pregnant unexpectedly see your health professional as soon as possible.

Can my child drive or cycle while taking atomoxetine?

- Your child may feel a bit light-headed at first when taking atomoxetine.
- If your child cycles or is old enough to drive, until this wears off or your child knows how atomoxetine affects him or her, he or she should avoid cycling, driving or operating machines.

Atomoxetine can help your child concentrate and so they may be less likely to have an accident, **but only if he or she takes it regularly.**

For more information go to <https://www.gov.uk/adhd-and-driving>

What sort of side-effects might my child get if taking atomoxetine?

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You **must** also see the maker's Patient Information Leaflet for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all. Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. Starting slower may help. If you think you might have a side effect to this medicine, you should ask your prescriber, doctor, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
COMMON (<i>fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Anorexia	Weight loss, not feeling hungry.	Contact your doctor, pharmacist or dietician for advice.
Nausea and vomiting	Feeling sick and being sick. Abdominal pain	If it is bad, contact your doctor. It may be possible to adjust the dose, or take it at bedtime. Taking it after food may help. It should wear off after a few weeks.
Increased alertness	Early morning waking Irritability and mood swings	Discuss this with your doctor. He/she may be able to change the time of the dose or doses.
Insomnia	Not being able to fall asleep at night	Discuss this with your doctor. He/she may be able to change the time of the dose or doses. Some find melatonin helps.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint	Do not stand up too quickly. Try to get your child to lie down when he or she feels it coming on.
UNCOMMON (<i>fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Constipation	When your child wants to poop but can't (the opposite of diarrhoea). Your child can't pass a motion.	Make sure your child eats enough fibre, cereal or fruit. Make sure your child is drinking enough fluid, keeps active and gets exercise e.g. walking. If this does not help, ask your doctor or pharmacist for a mild laxative.
Fatigue	Your child feel tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	If your child feels like this for more than a week after starting atomoxetine, tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust the dose slightly.
RARE but important (<i>can be serious if not dealt with quickly</i>)		
Skin rashes	Red rashes on the skin, dermatitis, pruritis (itching), swelling or hives (small raised, itchy patches of skin)	Stop atomoxetine and call your doctor or hospital immediately if your child gets this. Atomoxetine can cause a serious allergic reaction in rare cases.
Jaundice and hepatic damage	Pain just under the ribs, looking a bit yellow, feeling sick	Stop taking atomoxetine and contact your doctor straight away, don't delay.
Mood getting worse	Being aggressive, depressed, hostile and perhaps thinking about harming yourself	If this occurs, stop taking it and see your doctor straight away if they are feeling suicidal.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand more about atomoxetine. You **must** also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. The 'Handy charts' will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions.

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