

# ADHD EDUCATION

## WARNING >

## THE DANGERS OF TREATMENT HOLIDAYS

**A** treatment holiday for children with ADHD may be considered for two main reasons:

1. Parents who are weary of medication side effects take an opportunity to give their children a break from treatment, particularly during school holidays when the pressure to perform academically is lower.
2. Sometimes a doctor may prescribe a treatment holiday in order to evaluate a child's process and decide whether or not medication is still needed. However, many doctors are reluctant to take a break from treatment unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

A treatment holiday should not be initiated without recommendation from your doctor. After someone starts taking treatment, their body gets used to the higher levels of dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain. This means that, should someone suddenly stop taking their treatment, they may experience a significant drop in the levels of these neurotransmitters and display severe symptoms as a result. These can include feelings of depression, irritability, lack of energy, increased anxiety and decreased ability to focus. This can be detrimental at any time during a child's development, but particularly when there are additional stressors and disruptions already present in their lives. Individuals with ADHD often struggle to cope with stress **(1)** and are at risk of deteriorating levels of functioning if their condition is not managed well.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed significant amounts of stress on children due to disruptions in their routines and the need to adapt to varying levels of home schooling. There is likely less structure and guidance than what children are used to. The present circumstances are a challenge for any child, meaning that it is paramount to support your child with ADHD by ensuring that they take their medication exactly as prescribed. It is important to remember that the benefits of treatment extend beyond just academic performance. Medication has to do with managing behaviour in several different circumstances. During this unprecedented time, we should aim to give children the best chance to emerge from it without having negatively affected their schooling or their social development.

By supporting children with ADHD, we allow them to learn better impulse control and improve emotional regulation. Untreated ADHD carries a risk of poorer long-term self-esteem and social functioning **(2)**. We also give them a better chance to optimise learning and success at school. Long-term medication use, meaning consistent adherence without treatment holidays, is associated with better long-term academic performance **(3,4,5)**. Considering the current global situation, appropriate treatment is perhaps even more important as we navigate the multiple changes that COVID-19 has brought to our lives. This includes correct use of prescribed medications, as well as behavioural therapy and/or psychosocial interventions **(6)**.

## DID YOU KNOW >

## WHAT IS ADHD?

**A** ADHD is a common psychiatric disorder. It is most commonly diagnosed in children but can persist into adulthood and old age.

Although we still don't know exactly what causes ADHD, we do know that increasing certain types of chemicals, called neurotransmitters, in the brain helps to reduce symptoms and allows for better functioning and quality of life.

This is what pharmacological treatment for ADHD does - it increases the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine which helps to improve focus, concentration and to control impulses.



A "TREATMENT HOLIDAY" DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

PERHAPS IT IS TIME TO RECONSIDER.

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[SOURCES >](#)

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