

ADHD in Older Adults

What Your Doctor Needs to Know



ADHD doesn't disappear with age. Yet many health professionals are not trained to consider it in patients older than 50, leaving many adults with ADHD symptoms undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. Even after an ADHD diagnosis, many clinicians are reluctant or refuse to prescribe stimulant medications due to conflicting or outdated information, leaving many older adults without proper treatment.

It's never too late to seek a diagnosis and symptom relief. Use this Patient Resource to begin conversations about and pursue an evaluation for ADHD as an older adult.

It's Never Too Late for an ADHD Diagnosis

Age should never deter an older adult from pursuing an ADHD evaluation or treatment. The diagnosis alone is therapeutic and helps improve an individual's quality of life. Also, medical insurance will only cover testing, medication, psychotherapy, and other behavioral interventions with an ADHD diagnosis. However, clinicians should not solely rely on the *DSM-5* criteria for diagnosis because its ADHD symptoms apply largely to children and do not reflect the adult experience with attention deficit.

Stimulants Do Not Increase Your Cardiovascular Risk

Over the years, concerns about the safety of ADHD medications have hampered treatment, particularly in older adults. In 2022, *JAMA Network Open* published a groundbreaking meta-analysis of 19 observational studies, including 3.9

million participants, that found no statistically significant association between ADHD medications and hypertension, heart failure, or other cardiovascular disease (CVD), even among middle-aged and older adults. The study recommended further research on the risk of cardiac arrest and tachyarrhythmias among female patients and patients with pre-existing CVD.

Primary care physicians or cardiologists must approve stimulant use for an adult with pre-existing CVD or comorbidities that increase CVD risks before prescribing them (no matter the patient's age). If stimulants are not an option, older adults may benefit from non-stimulants.

You Need Not Discontinue ADHD Medication as You Age

Some clinicians discontinue stimulant prescriptions once their patients reach a certain age — regardless of how well the drugs have successfully treated ADHD. They're usually worried about the interaction between stimulants and other medications, as older adults are more likely to have several prescriptions, or about the impact of stimulants on the heart (see above). However, in geriatric medicine, it is not uncommon to prescribe stimulants to wake up the brain and provide energy. Read the package inserts that accompany stimulant medications to find out more, and ask your pharmacist to weigh in, too. Then, bring all your medications, questions, and concerns to your next doctor's visit to discuss.