

Substance Use Disorders and ADHD: 5 Key Facts and Additional Resources

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and substance use disorders (SUD) overlap considerably. About a quarter of adults with SUD have ADHD, and individuals with ADHD are three times more likely to develop an SUD.^{1,2} What's more, SUD is often more severe in individuals with ADHD.³

Research confirms that ADHD treatment (i.e., stimulant medication) drastically improves symptoms of both conditions and outcomes for patients with ADHD and SUD. Still, pervasive myths about addiction and ADHD medication often impede treatment.

Below are five critical takeaways from Dr. Timothy Wilens' *ADDitude* webinar, "[Substance Use Disorder and ADHD: Safe, Effective Treatment Options](#)," broadcast on January 31, 2023, along with additional resources to help you better understand ADHD and SUD.

1. Does stimulant medication use increase the risk of addiction (to other substances and/or to stimulants)?

No. Using stimulants for ADHD does not cause addiction to stimulants or other substances, including cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol. In fact, the opposite is true: Treating ADHD with medication reduces the risk of substance abuse, especially when treatment starts early.⁴

ADHD Stimulants and Drug Dependence: Next Steps

- **Read:** [Treating a Child with ADHD Medication Diminishes His Future Risk of Substance Abuse](#)
- **Read:** [Stimulant Medication Does Not Cause Drug Dependence](#)

2. Does untreated ADHD increase the likelihood of SUD?

Yes. Multiple long-term studies show that, compared to untreated individuals with ADHD, children and adults who are treated for ADHD are at decreased risk for developing substance use disorders.⁴

Risks of Untreated ADHD: Next Steps

- **Watch:** [How Untreated ADHD Shortens Life Expectancy](#)
- **Read:** [The Truth About ADHD and Addiction](#)
- **Read:** [Untreated ADHD and Substance Abuse](#)

3. Does stimulant medication help treat SUD as well?

Absolutely. For patients with ADHD and SUD, research shows that treating ADHD with stimulants improves a patient's ability to stay in treatment for SUD — and treatment retention is the most important factor in a patient's recovery.⁵

Stimulant Medications and Comorbidities: Next Steps

- **Read:** [A Patient's Primer on the Stimulant Medications Used to Treat ADHD](#)
- **Understand:** [8 ADHD Medication Mistakes and Fallacies](#)
- **Read:** [Maximize the Benefits of Your Teen's Stimulants](#)

4. What ADHD treatment plan is best for people with SUD and ADHD?

Structured therapies that use [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) (CBT adapted for SUD and ADHD) and medication are most effective for treating individuals with ADHD and SUD.⁶ If a patient's SUD is severe, or if the patient is high risk, a clinician may consider prescribing a non-stimulant or an extended-release stimulant rather than an immediate-release option that's more prone to abuse. In all, past substance use history should not preclude patients with ADHD from receiving treatment with stimulants.

- **Read:** [Is ADHD Medication Safe If You Have a History of Substance Abuse?](#)

5. What are the risks of marijuana use by teens and young adults with ADHD?

Marijuana is the drug most commonly misused by individuals with [ADHD](#). Studies show that chronic marijuana use, especially if initiated in adolescence, is linked to neuropsychological impairment, persistent [executive dysfunction](#), and other detrimental changes to brain function.²

ADHD Teens and Marijuana: Next Steps

- Read: [The Damaging Effects of Cannabis on the ADHD Brain](#)
- Read: [How Can I Discourage My Impulsive Teen From Experimenting With Drugs?](#)
- Read: [Is Your Teen Vaping? Why ADHD Brains Get Addicted & How to Quit](#)
- Read: [How to Treat a Teen Self-Medicating ADHD and Anxiety with Marijuana](#)

Substance Use Disorders and ADHD: Next Steps

- Watch Dr Wilens' Webinar: [Substance Use Disorder and ADHD —Safe, Effective Treatment Options](#)
- Overview: [ADHD and SUD](#)
- Read: [The ADHD & Addiction Link — Addictive Behaviours in Adults Explained](#)
- Read: [My Teen is Smoking Marijuana and Changing Before My Eyes. What Do I Do?](#)

This article is from Attitude Magazine March 2023, we have reproduced the info for ease.