

Atomoxetine (say: at-o-mocks-e-teen) for adults with ADHD

What is atomoxetine used for?

- Atomoxetine (also called Strattera®) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of ADHD
- It is sometimes used along with methylphenidate or lisdexamfetamine
- It is made as capsules and liquids (4mg in 1ml, which have a rather sweet taste).

- ☞ For ADHD, about 1 in 2 (50%) of people'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 in adults is around 80mg a day but may be higher in some people.

How should I take atomoxetine?

- Swallow the capsules with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing so they do not stick in your throat
- For the liquids, read the leaflet that comes with the bottle on how to use the oral syringe. The liquids should **not** be mixed with water or food
- It can be taken with or without food, but you may get less nausea taking it with food.

When should I take atomoxetine?

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

What are the alternatives to atomoxetine?

- There are other medicines (e.g. methylphenidate, lisdexamfetamine), talking therapies and 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 for ADHD
- The effect then builds over the next 2-3 months.

How long will I need to keep taking it for?

- Probably for several years but it should be reviewed at least once a year by your specialist.

Is atomoxetine addictive and can I stop taking it suddenly?

- Atomoxetine is not a stimulant and not addictive
- But it is unwise to stop taking it suddenly, even if you feel fine as your ADHD symptoms can return if treatment is stopped too early. This may occur some months after stopping
- When the time comes, you should come off it by a gradual drop in the dose over several weeks
- It normally works out much better if you stop medication in a planned way at a time when your stress levels are lower, rather than e.g. around life events
- Discuss this fully with your prescriber, pharmacist, or other healthcare professional.

See our handy fact sheet on 'Coming off Medicines'

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

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

If you have problems remembering your doses (as many people do) ask to see our Handy Fact Sheet "Remembering to take your medicines".

Will atomoxetine affect my other medication?

Atomoxetine can interact with some other medicines:

- If you need a decongestant such as pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine (often found in cold remedies), speak to your pharmacist before buying over the counter
- There is no problem with the 'Contraceptive Pill'
- Medicines which increase serotonin may increase the risk of developing Serotonin Syndrome. Seek help from a healthcare professional if you feel very dizzy or sick, feel hot and have muscle twitches.
- Make sure any prescriber and/or pharmacist who treats you knows you are taking atomoxetine.

You **must** see the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for the full possible list. Some of these medicines can still be used together but must follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking atomoxetine?

- You should have no problems with occasional alcoholic drinks.

Will I need any blood or other tests?

- You should not need any extra blood tests
- But you should have your blood pressure and pulse checked before you start atomoxetine
- They should also be checked every six months and after every dose change.

What about getting pregnant?

- Discuss this with your health professional

- There are leaflets that can help give you the information you need to make a choice
- Usually, people gradually reduce their dose before trying to get pregnant
- If you find yourself pregnant unexpectedly see your health professional as soon as possible.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking it?

- You may feel a bit dizzy at first so, until you know how it affects you, do not drive, cycle or operate machines.

Atomoxetine can help you concentrate and so you may actually be *less* likely to have an accident, **but only if you take it regularly every day.** (for more details go to www.gov.uk/adhd-and-driving)

What sort of side-effects might I get if I am 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 at a lower dose may help. If you think you might have a side effect to this medicine, you should ask your prescriber, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
VERY COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Anorexia	Weight loss, not feeling hungry.	If this is a problem, contact your prescriber or pharmacist for advice.
Nausea and vomiting	Feeling sick and being sick. Abdominal pain	If it is bad, contact your prescriber. It may be possible to adjust your 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 prescriber. You may be able to change the time of your dose or doses.
Insomnia	Not being able to fall asleep at night	Discuss this with your prescriber. You may be able to change the time of your dose or doses.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint	Do not stand up too quickly. Try and lie down when you feel it coming on. Do not drive or cycle if affected.
COMMON (<i>fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Constipation	When you want to poop but can't (the opposite of diarrhoea). You can't pass a motion.	- Eat enough fibre, cereal or fruit - Drink enough fluid - Keep active and get some exercise e.g. walking. If this does not help, ask your prescriber for a mild laxative.
Fatigue	You feel tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting atomoxetine, tell your prescriber. It may be possible to adjust your 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 prescriber or hospital immediately if you get this. Atomoxetine can cause a serious allergic reaction in rare cases.
Mood getting worse	Being aggressive, depressed, hostile and perhaps thinking about harming yourself	If this occurs, discuss with your prescriber as soon as possible. Stop taking it and go to A&E if you are feeling suicidal.
Jaundice and hepatic damage	Pain just under the ribs, looking a bit yellow, feeling sick	Stop taking atomoxetine and contact your prescriber straight away, don't delay.

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. Do not share medicines with anyone else. 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. V07.15 [AS/SRB 12-2024; RRAP1024, review by 10-2026] ©2024 Mistura™ Enterprise Ltd (www.choiceandmedication.org). Choice and Medication™ indemnity applies only to licensed subscribing organisations and the personal use by that organisation's service users and carers, using the latest version. **Use by non-subscribing healthcare professionals, organisations or individuals is prohibited**