

# From Antidepressant to ADHD Medication? About Wellbutrin for ADHD



Medically reviewed by [Zara Risoldi Cochrane, Pharm.D., M.S., FASCP](#) — Written by [Jacquelyn Cafasso](#) — Updated on January 4, 2019

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## What is Wellbutrin?

Wellbutrin is the brand name for the antidepressant drug [bupropion](#). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Wellbutrin in the United States for treating depression in 1985. They approved its use to help people [stop smoking](#) in 1997.

## Off-label use of Wellbutrin

Doctors often use medications “[off-label](#)” when there’s scientific evidence to show that a medication might help with a certain condition, even though the medication isn’t currently approved by the FDA for that particular use.

Wellbutrin isn’t approved by the FDA to treat [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#). But some doctors prescribe Wellbutrin off-label to treat ADHD.

### RESEARCH SAYS

Wellbutrin has shown promising benefits in adults with ADHD during clinical trials, but more research is needed. Wellbutrin typically isn’t recommended for children since its safety and effectiveness hasn’t been established.

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## Why Wellbutrin?

Stimulant medications, like [Adderall](#) and [Ritalin](#), are the most widely accepted and

tested treatments for ADHD in both children and [adults](#). But stimulant medications have a high potential for misuse, especially in teens and adults.

For some people, stimulants aren't as effective for treating ADHD. Studies have shown that up to [20 percent](#) of people treated for ADHD don't respond to stimulants. For this reason, researchers have been looking for alternative, nonstimulant options for adults with ADHD.

Your doctor may consider using Wellbutrin to treat your ADHD if:

- you can't tolerate stimulants because of side effects
- stimulants haven't been effective in managing your ADHD symptoms
- you have a medical condition, such as a mental health disorder or tic disorder, for which taking stimulants isn't advised
- you have a substance use disorder
- your ADHD is complicated by other mental disorders, like depression
- you have an addiction to nicotine

There have been a small number of studies conducted to evaluate Wellbutrin in treating ADHD. Scientists are interested in Wellbutrin because of the way it's thought to work.

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Wellbutrin acts on chemicals in the brain called [dopamine](#) and norepinephrine, in a way similar to how stimulants are believed to work.

## Is there research to support using Wellbutrin for ADHD?

There have been several [small, randomized clinical trials](#) completed to test how well Wellbutrin works to treat ADHD. All of these studies were done in adults.

In these trials, which included a total of more than 400 people, long-acting forms of Wellbutrin resulted in clinically significant improvements in the symptoms of ADHD. It was also shown to be safe compared to a placebo.

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# Dosage for ADHD

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## Adult dosage (ages 18–64 years)

For depression and smoking cessation, Wellbutrin is typically taken in a 100-milligram (mg) dose three times daily (300 mg total). A doctor might start you at a lower dose and slowly increase the dose over time.

The maximum dose is 450 mg per day, taken in divided doses of no more than 150 mg each.

The sustained release formulation of Wellbutrin (Wellbutrin SR) may be taken in a dose of 150 mg once or twice daily. The extended release version of Wellbutrin (Wellbutrin XL) is usually taken as a single 300-mg pill once in the morning.

In [clinical trials](#) that assessed Wellbutrin for ADHD, the dosage ranged from 150 mg up to 450 mg daily.

## Child dosage (ages 0–17 years)

Wellbutrin hasn't been shown to be safe and effective for use in people younger than 18 years old. There's no FDA-approved dosage for children.

## What are the side effects of Wellbutrin?

### ✓ Common Wellbutrin side effects

- dizziness
- loss of appetite
- blurred vision
- agitation
- insomnia
- headache
- dry mouth
- nausea
- vomiting
- constipation
- sweating
- muscle twitching

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## ✓ Less common Wellbutrin side effects

- drowsiness
- restlessness
- trouble sleeping
- weakness

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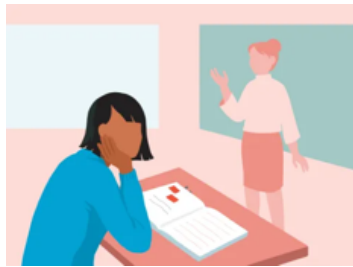
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## Wellbutrin risks

Wellbutrin's product label contains a black box warning from the FDA due to a potential increased risk of suicidal thinking and behavior. This risk is seen in children, teens, and young adults less than 24 years old.

Anyone treated with Wellbutrin should be monitored for suicidal thoughts, behavior, and attempted suicide.

## ✓ Suicide prevention

1. If you think someone is at immediate risk of self-harm or hurting another person:
2. • Call 911 or your local emergency number.
3. • Stay with the person until help arrives.
4. • Remove any guns, knives, medications, or other things that may cause harm.
5. • Listen, but don't judge, argue, threaten, or yell.
6. If you or someone you know is considering suicide, get help from a

crisis or suicide prevention hotline. Try the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

## healthline

You should also call a doctor or seek emergency care if any of the following occurs after taking Wellbutrin:

- fainting
- fast or pounding heartbeat
- rash or hives
- hallucinations
- seizures
- trouble breathing

Wellbutrin shouldn't be used by anyone with a history of seizures or eating disorders, or by people diagnosed with [bipolar disorder](#).

Don't take Wellbutrin with the following medications:

- other drugs containing bupropion, such as Zyban
- monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), like phenelzine (Nardil)

Wellbutrin can interact with several other drugs. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking Wellbutrin if you take any other medications.

[For more about how antidepressants like Wellbutrin work, read our detailed guide on these medications and their side effects.](#)

## Other treatments for ADHD

The most commonly used medications for ADHD are in a class of compounds known as stimulants. These include:

- [methylphenidate](#) (Ritalin, Concerta)
- amphetamine-dextroamphetamine ([Adderall](#))
- dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine)
- lisdexamfetamine (Vyvanse)

There are [three nonstimulant drugs](#) approved by the FDA to treat ADHD in adults:

- atomoxetine (Strattera)
- guanfacine (Intuniv)
- [clonidine](#) (Kapvay)

Nonstimulants might be less effective than stimulants, but they're also considered less addictive.

**Behavioral therapy**, like cognitive behavioral therapy, may also help with ADHD. Cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on creating healthier behavioral patterns and changing a person's way of thinking.

## The takeaway

Wellbutrin has shown promise in small clinical trials for treating ADHD in adults.

If your doctor prescribes Wellbutrin for managing your ADHD symptoms, the prescription will be for off-label use. Your doctor will likely have a good reason for recommending Wellbutrin in lieu of an FDA-approved ADHD medication.

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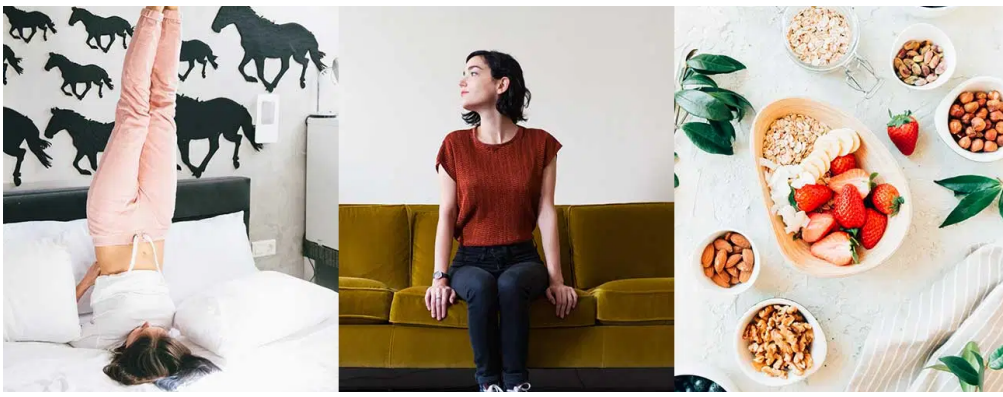


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## 9 Tips for Managing ADHD Mood Swings



Medically reviewed by [Timothy J. Legg, Ph.D., CRNP](#) — Written by New Life Outlook — Updated on February 19, 2019



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which can make you feel helpless or demoralized. Obviously, this is no way to live your life.

[ADHD medication](#) can be very helpful when it comes to focus, [anxiety](#), and mood swings, but it's not a universal cure. After all, ADHD manifests in different ways, and it can be difficult to get the dosage right to fight off your particular set of [symptoms](#).

If you find your moods are getting the better of you, it may be time to consult a psychiatrist to investigate further. But there's plenty you can do on your own time to balance out your volatile temperament. Here are nine tips for managing [mood swings](#) right away:

## 1. Schedule time to vent

Letting feelings and reactions bubble up inside can be uncomfortable and will probably end badly. Instead, put aside time every week — or every day, if you need to — to let off steam with a fun, energetic activity.

Dance around to loud music, watch an intense sports match, or join a fitness class at your local gym. Anything that works well as a [stress reliever](#) will do the trick.

Although venting your anger or frustration is crucial, it's also important to put aside time to [be calm](#). In both cases, literally scheduling the activity will help you stick to the plan and not feel guilty about taking time out for yourself.

## 2. Work on shifting your focus

Once you come to terms with your emotional whims, you can focus on getting through the mood swing rather than on why it's happened. Don't waste time on blaming yourself or someone else. Rather, learn strategies to help the problem pass more quickly.

Get into the habit of jumping into an activity when your mood changes. A book, video game, or conversation can be enough to pull you out of your psychological turmoil. Remind yourself (out loud, if necessary) that this mood will pass, and it's best just to wait it out rather than try to dissect it.

### 3. Prepare for the days when you get the blues

For many people with ADHD, an exciting or successful event can bring about depressing aftermath. It may seem strange, but once the stimulus has passed and the challenge is over, people with ADHD can miss the conflict and swing to the other emotional extreme.

Knowing this might happen, you can prepare for the blues by keeping some helpful distractions within arm's reach. Have a list of positive, upbeat friends to call when you need a lift, and keep your favorite movies at the ready.

It's also a good idea to store your exercise bag or equipment at the front door so you're ready to hit the road or pop out to the gym and boost your mood as soon as you need the endorphin rush.

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### 4. Take control of your “hyperfocus”

ADHD is often associated with a very short attention span, but that's not entirely accurate. The condition involves an unregulated attention span, which can manifest in the very opposite way. Children and adults with ADHD sometimes focus very intently on things — and that can be a blessing or a curse.

Learn to use this [hyperfocus](#) to your benefit, rather than let it lead you into an emotional ditch. When a bad mood grabs hold, turn to your passion, whether that's work or a hobby. Find ways to make the tasks around you more engaging so you can shake off the emotional burden and simply enjoy what's in front of you until the mood drifts off.



## 5. Exercise often

When you stay active, you stay balanced. Although challenging exercises and competitive sports can stir up energy and aggression, the endorphins released will almost immediately lift your mood. Few therapies can get rid of stress, burn off frustration, and replenish concentration as much as [regular exercise](#).

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If you can't fit a full routine into each day, don't despair. Studies show that even [short workout sessions](#) spread throughout the day can bring similar results as one long workout session. Find an exercise — or better yet, several activities — you truly enjoy and can do easily and often.

## 6. Put humor first

When you can laugh at yourself, you won't stay angry for long. Learning to make light of your mistakes and poke fun at your ADHD slip-ups is a huge step toward better relationships and a happier lifestyle.

Impulsiveness, forgetfulness, hyperactivity, and disorganization can be aggravating, but they can also be fodder for jokes. Sure, not every mistake can or should be laughed off — you do need to take responsibility for your own actions — but when you can playfully point out your own faults, you'll find that the people around you are much more sympathetic and forgiving.

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## 7. Consider a diet change

Your menu can't necessarily change your personality and emotions, but [certain ingredients](#) may have more impact than you imagine. Food additives and preservatives should be the first to go.

Many doctors and nutritionists agree that artificial colorings and certain food modifiers (namely MSG) can be detrimental to behavior, especially for children.

You can better balance your blood sugar levels, as well as [keep your hormones stable](#), with a diet full of [high-fiber](#) veggies, whole grains, and lean protein to keep

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you full and energized for longer. Keep in mind that sugar and simple carbs (such as white bread, rice, and potatoes) can spike your blood sugar, and in turn, [affect your mood](#).

## 8. Set a solid sleep schedule

Sleeping well is just as important as eating well, which means you need to take your sleep routine very seriously. Most people find that their moods, energy levels, and even their appetites are much better after [a good night's sleep](#).

A strict [sleep routine](#) is your best bet for restful and regenerative shut-eye. Go to bed at the same time every night, and [don't keep any electronics in the bedroom](#). Keep your evening routine low-key so you can gently ease into bedtime mode — some light reading before bed can slow down the mind and help you drift off before you know it.

## 9. Compliment others

Your ADHD can take up a lot of your attention, and it's easy to get into a cycle of self-criticism and obsession over little worries. Try to break out of that cycle by turning your attention to the people around you.

Learning to notice others and empathize with their thoughts and feelings can take some practice, but this is well worth your time and attention. When you can focus on the positive aspects of others, it can help distract you from your own feelings, as well as help you build relationships in the process.

It's important to realize that you have a lot of power when it comes to how you manage your ADHD. Don't let the world control you and what you have to offer. As you learn how to advocate for yourself, you could find that not only your confidence is improving, but that your moods and interactions are easier to manage.

*The symptoms of ADHD may be similar to other conditions, such as [bipolar disorder](#). If you're experiencing severe mood swings, talk to your doctor to see what you can do and make sure you have a proper diagnosis.*

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*NewLifeOutlook aims to empower people living with chronic mental and physical health conditions, encouraging them to embrace a positive outlook despite unfortunate circumstances. Their articles are full of practical advice from people who have firsthand experience of ADHD.*

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