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## Can You Take Adderall and Antidepressants Together?

What you should know if you need treatment for ADHD as well as depression.

by [Barbara Brody](#) Health Writer



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DEPRESSION IS ONE of the most common mental health disorders, and anyone can develop it. But while about 7% of the general population has depression, people who have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) seem to be especially prone. One in three people with ADHD are believed to have depression or have experienced a depressive episode, reports the organization [Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder \(CHADD\)](#).

Why ADHD and depression sometimes overlap isn't completely understood. One recent study published in the journal *Psychological Medicine* points to a genetic link between the two conditions. The authors also write that that it's possible that, at least for some people, living with the symptoms of ADHD causes them to feel overwhelmed and takes a toll on their self-image. What is clear is that both ADHD and depression can be serious and require treatment, including in those who have both conditions at the same time. Since stimulants like Adderall are often used to manage ADHD and depression is often treated with antidepressants, that begs the question: Can you take both Adderall and antidepressants?

In short, yes. People can and do take both of these drugs, and oftentimes that's OK, says [Douglas Paauw, M.D.](#), a professor of medicine and chair of patient-centered clinical education at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. But there are potential problems that may occur if you combine these medications, so some caution is warranted, say experts. Here, learn more about each of these medications, and how to safely take them simultaneously.

### How Antidepressants Work

The most popular antidepressants used today are in the SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) or SNRI (serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor) classes. These include drugs like Zoloft (sertraline), Prozac (fluoxetine), Lexapro (escitalopram), and many others.

The exact mechanism for how antidepressants treat depression isn't fully understood, but experts believe that these drugs work, at least in part, by preventing certain brain chemicals including serotonin from being reabsorbed into neurons (brain cells), according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). As a result, more serotonin remains outside of neurons, which helps them communicate, and in turn, strengthens circuits in the brain that regulate mood.

### How Adderall Works

Adderall is a stimulant. It's actually a combination of two drugs, amphetamine and dextroamphetamine; together, these help improve focus and reduce impulsive thoughts and behaviors by stimulating the central nervous system, including the brain. Part of the way Adderall has this stimulating impact is by increasing two brain chemicals, dopamine and norepinephrine.

Adderall also has the potential to increase serotonin. "It's not the primary thing that [stimulants] do, but if you take that little increase and then add it to the increase from taking an SSRI you could get into trouble," says Dr. Paauw. If your serotonin levels get too high, you could develop something called serotonin syndrome (more on that below).

### Mixing Adderall and Antidepressants

"The combination of Adderall and antidepressants is generally classified as a moderate interaction, with the suggestion of monitoring patients for signs of toxicity," says [Danielle Fixen, Pharm.D.](#), an associate professor at Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, CO.

In other words, if you're someone who requires both these drugs, you should be under the careful watch of a doctor, psychiatrist, or other licensed prescriber who can dose you properly and keep an eye out for side effects, says Dr. Fixen.

And while no one should be using Adderall recreationally (without having your own prescription), you definitely should not experiment with this drug on your own if you take an antidepressant, says Dr. Paauw.

He explains that the biggest risk of combining these drugs is that you might develop a potentially dangerous condition called serotonin syndrome. But there are a few ways to protect yourself and lower the risk.

### Serotonin Syndrome

The biggest potential danger of combining Adderall and an antidepressant is serotonin syndrome. Sometimes called serotonin toxicity, this problem occurs when your levels of serotonin become dangerously high.

Plenty of people take Adderall and an antidepressant and don't end up with serotonin syndrome, but it does happen—especially in people who are taking high doses of an antidepressant. "Maybe you don't respond to 50 mg of sertraline, so your doctor has you go up to 100 mg. That's pretty common," says Dr. Paauw, and not usually problematic. But if you're still depressed and your doctor increases your dose toward the upper safe limit—say, to 200 mg of sertraline—and you're taking Adderall on top of that, then serotonin syndrome becomes a real concern, he adds.

Adding a third drug that also impacts serotonin significantly ups the likelihood of trouble. Watch out for any cough and cold medications that contain dextromethorphan, warns Dr. Paauw. Migraine medication in the triptan class, such as sumatriptan (Imitrex) or zolmitriptan (Zomig) might also create a dangerous cocktail if combined with Adderall and an antidepressant. Tramadol, a strong pain reliever in the opioid class, can also lead to serotonin syndrome when combined with Adderall and an antidepressant, says Dr. Paauw.

"It's the addition of a third drug that often brings people into the ER," he says.

### Symptoms of Serotonin Syndrome

Serotonin syndrome can be mild, moderate, or severe, Dr. Paauw explains. If your serotonin levels are a little too high, you might experience:

- Agitation
- Restlessness
- Tremor
- Trouble sleeping

If you suspect this is happening, call your doctor and ask if you should make any changes to your medication regimen.

As serotonin levels become even higher, symptoms can include:

- Diarrhea
- Feeling uncoordinated
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased heart rate
- Muscle twitches and tremors
- Nausea
- Sweatiness

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms and have been combining antidepressants with Adderall, connect with your healthcare provider or seek medical attention at the emergency room. You will likely be advised to stop or reduce one or more of your medications.

Severe symptoms of serotonin syndrome include:

- Coma
- High fever
- Irregular heartbeats
- Seizure

When serotonin syndrome becomes this serious, patients usually need to be sedated, provided supportive care, and treated in an intensive care unit. An [antidote medication called cyproheptadine](#) may be used to bring down serotonin levels. Those who don't get prompt or proper treatment could die from serotonin syndrome.

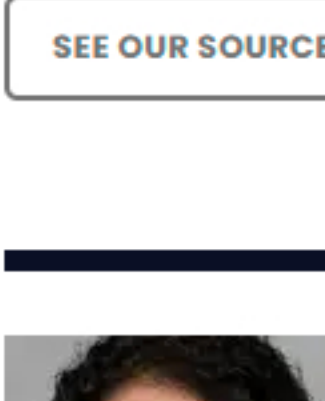
### How to Lower the Risk of Serotonin Syndrome

If you have both ADHD and depression and both conditions require you to be on medication, that's probably OK—but you need to be smart about it. To protect yourself from serotonin syndrome, make sure your doctor knows about all the medications you're taking, including any over the counter drugs as well as those that might have been prescribed by another healthcare provider. Be honest about any drugs you take recreationally, too. To keep you safe, your doctor will probably advise sticking with a low dose of antidepressants while taking Adderall.

Your doctor might also advise that you space out your medications. If you take your antidepressant before bed, you can take your Adderall in the morning. Or, you can wait to take your ADHD medication until about an hour before you actually need it, like before a big test or presentation, says [Stephen Ferrara, D.N.P.](#), president-elect of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and associate dean of clinical affairs at Columbia University School of Nursing in New York City. He adds that many people who take Adderall can use it as needed (assuming your ADHD isn't severe and you're not taking an extended-release formula), rather than every day. Antidepressants, however, need to be taken daily.

It's important for your health to get treatment for both depression and ADHD. If you take antidepressants and Adderall, it's important to do so under a healthcare provider's watch, and that you know and pay attention to the symptoms of serotonin syndrome. If you become restless and agitated, or if you develop muscle twitching or major digestive distress, contact your provider. If you develop any serious signs of serotonin syndrome, such as a very high fever or seizures, get medical attention immediately.

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