

# Atomoxetine

Atomoxetine (Strattera) is a non-stimulant medication that treats attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Its benefits build up gradually over 2-4 weeks, and it is particularly helpful for anxiety in ADHD. It may also treat:

- Binge eating disorder
- Stimulant, cocaine, and amphetamine abuse
- Nocturnal enuresis (bed wetting)

Atomoxetine also helps sleep apnea by improving muscle tone in the throat (sleep apnea is common in ADHD, affecting 20-30%). It is currently being explored as a treatment for sleep apnea with positive results.

Atomoxetine is not safe in bipolar disorder because it has an antidepressant structure. It was originally developed as an antidepressant but did not work well in depression.

It is similar to another antidepressant that is used in ADHD, viloxazine (Qelbree),

## How it works

Atomoxetine enhances norepinephrine and may also increase dopamine, two neurotransmitters involved in anxiety, depression, attention, and concentration.

Unlike stimulants for ADHD, atomoxetine does not have abuse potential and is not a controlled substance.

## How should I take it?

Atomoxetine can be taken once daily, or in divided doses to prevent gastrointestinal side effects. If it causes fatigue, take at night.

## What if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

## Key Points

1. Atomoxetine treats ADHD and anxiety.
2. It takes 2-4 weeks to work.
3. It is well tolerated but rarely causes fatigue.

## How long do I need to take it?

How long you need to take it will depend on your condition. Often symptoms of ADHD improve with age or changes in life circumstances and the medication can be tapered off.

## What happens if I stop it?

Atomoxetine is not addictive and does not cause significant withdrawal symptoms.

## Side effects

Drowsiness happens in 4-11% of patients (particularly in children) – may take at night if atomoxetine is too sedating.

Decreased appetite, nausea, abdominal pain – taking atomoxetine in divided doses may help prevent stomach distress.

Atomoxetine may cause some sexual side effects particularly in men (4-8%) including erectile dysfunction and ejaculatory disorder. Sexual dysfunction in women may include decreased libido and abnormal orgasm.

Extremely rarely, atomoxetine has been associated with increased heart rate and high blood pressure, liver damage, hypomania and activation of suicide ideation (short-term studies did not show an increase in the risk of

suicidality with antidepressants compared to placebo beyond age 24; the average risk of suicidal ideation in patients receiving atomoxetine as 0.4%).

As you are starting the medicine, use caution when driving or performing tasks that require alertness. This should not be a problem once you have adjusted to the medicine and know how it affects you.

*Pregnancy:* Atomoxetine has not been adequately evaluated during pregnancy. It is unknown if atomoxetine secreted in breast milk.

### Overdose

Atomoxetine is relatively safe in overdose but can cause arrhythmias of the heart.

### Interactions

Tramadol can increase the risk of seizures in patients taking an antidepressant. Levels of atomoxetine may be increased by antidepressants, including paroxetine and fluoxetine, so atomoxetine dose may need to be reduced.

The web sites below help you check for drug interactions. You should talk with us about the information you find as many drug interactions have only a mild effect:

[reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker](http://reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker)

### How to store and dispose of medication

- Keep out of the reach of children.
- Store away from heat, direct light and damp places.
- To safely dispose of unwanted pills: Do not pour in the toilet or sink (it will enter the water supply). To prevent children or pets from eating it, mix unwanted pills in a bag with a little water and inedible trash (such as

coffee grounds or kitty litter) and throw in the trash.

### Cost and insurance coverage

Atomoxetine is available in generic. If you are paying out-of-pocket, the lowest cost is usually found at [www.goodrx.com](http://www.goodrx.com).

### Atomoxetine

Brands	Strattera
Dose range	Adults & children up to 70 kg): 40-100 mg/day Children (up to 70 kg): 0.5-1.2 mg/kg/day or 100 mg/day
Sizes	Capsules: 10 mg, 18 mg, 25 mg, 40 mg, 60 mg, 80 mg, 100 mg.
Release date	11/26/2002
FDA-approval	ADHD

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 4/26/25