

ADHD NEWS & RESEARCH

ADHD Medication Use Lowers the Risk of Suicidality, Criminality, Drug Misuse, Car Accidents: Study

ADHD medication use significantly reduces the risk of lethal events when it begins within three months of a diagnosis, according to a new study of nearly 150,000 people with attention deficit.



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The benefits of ADHD medication use include significantly reduced rates of first-time and recurring suicidality, criminal behaviors, vehicular accidents, and substance misuse, according to a new study published in *The BMJ*.¹

“Public discourse, media coverage, and interactions with individuals affected by ADHD show that many patients and caregivers lack awareness of the risks and [benefits of ADHD drug treatment](#), leading to uncertainty in treatment decisions,” the study’s authors wrote. “This knowledge gap served as a key motivation for our research.”

Indeed, in an [ADDitude survey](#) of more than 11,000 readers, less than half of caregivers said they chose to medicate their children within 6 months of diagnosis, largely due to the fear of real or perceived [side effects](#) like appetite suppression or sleep disruption. Few said they considered the risks associated with *not* treating ADHD symptoms with medication when making their treatment decisions.

This research may change that.

Benefits of ADHD Medication

The *BMJ* study, which examined the effects of drug treatment for ADHD on first-time and recurrent adverse life events, found a strong association between [ADHD medication](#) use and decreased first-time occurrences of:

- suicidal behavior: down 17%
- [substance misuse](#): down 15%
- criminality: down 13%
- transport accidents: down 12%

ADHD medication use reduced the risk of recurrent events across all five studied categories, according to the study:

- recurrent substance misuse: down 25%
- recurrent criminality: down 25%
- recurrent transport accidents: down 16%
- repeated suicidal attempts: down 15%
- repeated accidental injuries: down 4%

Study participants with a history of [suicidality](#), accidental injuries, substance misuse, and criminality exhibited a more pronounced decrease in all five outcomes compared to those without such a history.

“This may be because people with multiple occurrences of such events typically have more severe ADHD, making them more likely to benefit from drug treatment,” the study’s authors wrote. “Additionally, the cumulative effect of ADHD drug treatment may lead to additive improvements over time, whereas negative consequences may accumulate the longer an individual goes untreated.”

In addition, study participants taking [stimulant medications](#) experienced greater risk reductions than did those taking [non-stimulants](#).

“The beneficial effects of ADHD drug treatment observed in our study may be explained by reductions in impulsivity and improvements in attention and executive functions, in line with findings from randomized controlled trials,” the study’s authors wrote.^{2,3} “For instance, reduced impulsivity may lower criminality by curbing aggressive behavior, whereas enhanced attention may decrease the risk of transport accidents by minimizing distractions.”

The study included 148,581 individuals (aged 6 to 64 years) with ADHD diagnoses from Swedish national registers. More than half (57%) of those individuals started drug treatment for ADHD within three months of their diagnosis. Methylphenidate (brand name: [Ritalin](#)) was the most prescribed drug (88.4%), followed by [atomoxetine](#) at 7.9% and lisdexamfetamine (brand name: [Vyvanse](#)) at 3.3%.

What the Research Says About ADHD Medication’s Protective Benefits

Several recent studies have confirmed the serious consequences of untreated ADHD and the beneficial effects of ADHD drug treatment on health-related and social outcomes. According to one study published in [The British Journal of Psychiatry](#) earlier this year, the life expectancy for people with ADHD is 7.5 years shorter than it is for those without the condition; medication use helps close that longevity gap.⁴

“We believe that [gap] is likely caused by modifiable risk factors and unmet support and treatment needs in terms of both ADHD and co-occurring mental and physical health conditions,” the study’s authors wrote.

Findings from a new longitudinal magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) study published in [Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology & Biological Psychiatry](#) show that early and consistent use of methylphenidate influences frontal lobe development in the brains of children with ADHD, underscoring the importance of early intervention and treatment.⁵

“The findings suggest that initiating methylphenidate treatment earlier, particularly before the age of 12, may be more effective in driving structural brain changes and potentially normalizing the atypical brain development associated with ADHD,” the researchers wrote.

Another new longitudinal, population-based study published in [JAMA Psychiatry](#) linked ADHD medication use with a reduced risk of:

- self-harm: down 15% to 29%
- traffic crashes: down 13% to 29%

- crime: down 16% to 27%
- unintentional injury: down 7% to 13%.⁶

Future of ADHD Medication in Limbo

In May, the [MAHA Commission](#), spearheaded by Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., vowed to “assess the prevalence of and threat posed by the prescription of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers, stimulants, and weight-loss drugs.”

The subsequent [MAHA Report](#) incorrectly stated that stimulant medication use does “not improve outcomes long-term.” Evidence from the above studies convincingly refutes this claim; however, many members of the ADHD community fear forthcoming stimulant medication restrictions that may impact their access to ADHD prescriptions.

The commission’s policy recommendations for “reversing the childhood chronic disease crisis” are expected later this month.

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