

ADHD MEDICATION · 4.11

Medication Holidays: Are They a Good Idea?

A medication holiday is a planned break from ADHD medication, agreed with the prescriber. Sometimes it makes sense, sometimes it does not. The answer depends on why it is being considered.

FOR

Adults and parents thinking about weekend or school holidays

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

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PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

Medication Holidays: Are They a Good Idea?

What a medication holiday actually is

- **A deliberate, planned break agreed with the prescriber.** Weekend breaks, summer holidays, or short event-based pauses are the usual patterns. ADHD medications work each day they are taken, so flexible dosing is possible without losing tomorrow's response.
- **Different from unplanned stopping.** Self-managed pauses without prescriber knowledge are not medication holidays. The clinical and practical risks are different. Always involve the prescriber before changing the pattern.
- **More common with stimulants than non-stimulants.** Stimulants work day-by-day, so holidays are clinically feasible. Atomoxetine and guanfacine build effect cumulatively and lose it when stopped, so holidays are not a standard option for them.

When holidays can make sense, and when they do not

- **Growth concerns in children.** Slowed growth in weight (and sometimes height) is a known stimulant effect in children. A medication-free summer is sometimes used to allow growth catch-up. NICE NG87 mentions this as one option to consider.
- **Adult patient preference at weekends.** Some adults prefer to be off medication on rest days. This is a legitimate choice if the weekend demands on attention and self-regulation are low.
- **A diagnostic break to assess tolerance.** Where stimulant effect feels less clear after sustained daily use, a planned short break can help assess whether tolerance is the explanation. Tolerance to therapeutic stimulant doses is debated in the literature.
- **Not a good idea during active titration.** Holidays in mid-titration confuse the picture for both patient and prescriber. Wait until a working dose is established.
- **Not a good idea where function depends on the medication.** Driving safety, working pattern, mental health stability or weekend caregiving demands can all be substantially affected by a lost day. The trade-offs matter.

How we approach this with you

- **We talk through the reason first.** Why a holiday is being considered shapes whether it is the right move. Growth concerns, tolerance concerns, weekend preference and event-based pauses are all reasonable; each has different planning.
- **Document growth where holidays are taken for growth reasons.** Children's reviews include weight and height. If the holiday is being used to allow growth catch-up, the next review should assess whether the strategy is working.
- **We adjust the prescription pattern accordingly.** Controlled-drug prescriptions are quantity-limited. Intermittent dosing changes how often a prescription is needed and how the pharmacy supplies it. We plan that with you.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP, your prescriber or NHS 111 before introducing any planned break in ADHD medication, particularly if you have noticed mood changes or reduced effect. Seek urgent help via 999 or A&E for any acute mental health crisis.

SOURCES

NICE NG87; BNF; Cortese et al. 2018 (Lancet Psychiatry)

NEXT STEPS**Speak to NeuroFX**

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