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ADHD Medication: Driving, Work & Sports

GP ADHD Shared Care Program:
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Version 3-2025:
Endorsed Clinical Director CAMHS, Unit Head General Medicine, March 2025

Interpreter

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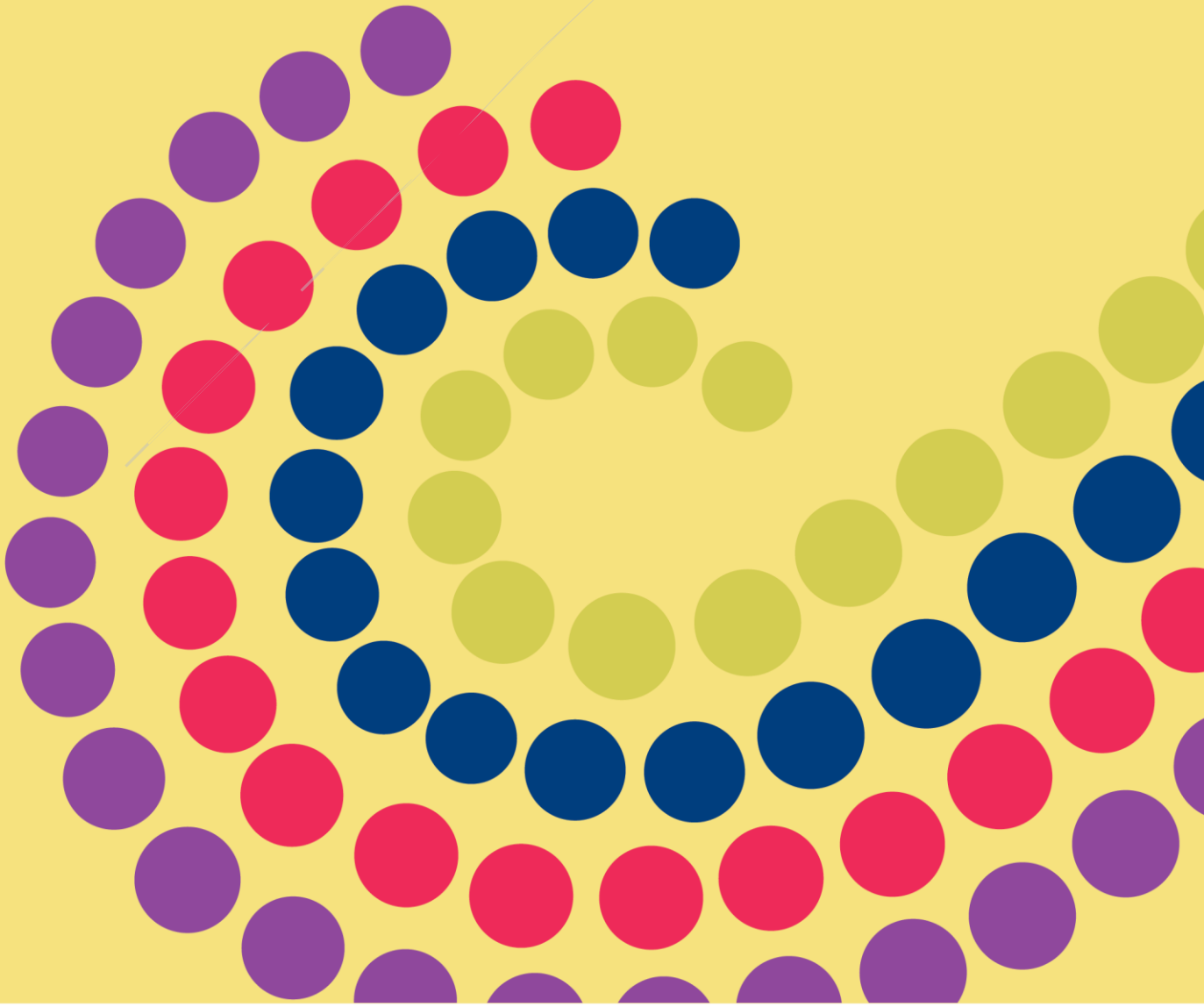

Government of South Australia
Women's and Children's Health Network

CREATE together

ADHD Medication & Driving, Work and Sports.

There are many situations where it is normal for drug testing to occur, such as road-side drug-driving tests, workers in industries where alertness is critical (eg mining) and in competition sports.

Many people on medication for ADHD are regular drivers, work in a mine or are an elite athlete. This is a normal part of life but there is important information you need to be aware of.

Driving

The Australian Evidence-Based Clinical Practice ADHD Guideline (aadpa.com.au) collates evidence that untreated ADHD is associated with increased risky driving including accidents and infringements. The clinical consensus recommendation is that ADHD treatment reduces the adverse impacts on driving of untreated ADHD.

In South Australia, if you are on ADHD medication and getting your license, it is it is safe and legal to drive. You don't need to do anything formal except be aware it is an offence to drive if ANY medication (even legal and/or non-prescription ones) is affecting your ability to drive or ride safely.

For example, if you take an over-the-counter antihistamine and it made you drowsy or agitated, you must not drive until you are back to normal. So always check the side effects and advice about driving or operating heavy machinery on the box of ANY medication!

Also be aware that combining different medications may have an even greater effect on your ability to drive safely. Negative effects of prescription and over-the-counter medications include drowsiness, blurred vision, poor concentration, slower reaction times and aggressive behaviour.

The Health Direct website Medicines and driving | healthdirect lists common side effects of medicines, with advice about drugs that may impact your ability to drive safely.

The following guidelines are important for ALL drivers who are taking ANY medication:

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist whether it is safe to drive
- Always read and follow the instructions on the medicine's warning label
- Remember that the medicine might affect your driving more when you first start taking it. Over time, you may get used to it and experience fewer side effects.
- Don't stop taking your medicine or alter the dose without talking to your doctor first
- Talk to your doctor about switching any medicine that affects your driving
- Don't take more than the prescribed dose of the medicine
- Don't drink alcohol or take other drugs while you're taking medicines
- Don't drive if you have missed a dose of medicine that you need to control symptoms that could affect your driving
- Arrange another form of transport, such as public transport or a taxi.

Drug-Driving

Police road-side drug testing detects methylamphetamine, THC (cannabis), and MDMA (ecstasy), whereas ADHD medications are dexamphetamine, lisdexamfetamine, and methylphenidate. Therefore, roadside saliva testing will normally not detect ADHD medication.

Some patients have asked what happens if they produce a positive road-side drug test and are only taking ADHD medication. In this case, where a person denies use of a methyl amphetamine or MDMA (ecstasy), a second oral fluid sample is taken by police for analysis by Forensic Science SA. The results of this analysis only determines if methyl amphetamine, MDMA (ecstasy) or Cannabis (THC) is present in a person's body. Forensic Science SA do not test for medicines used to treat ADHD. Your medication will not show up and if you have not taken illegal drugs, there will be no evidence of drug-driving.

Keeping a letter from your GP confirming you are prescribed ADHD medication, in your wallet or phone to show the SAPOL Officer during a road-side test may assist in explaining any rare unexpected roadside positive screening test results

For more information on South Australian drug-driving rules, go to:
SAPOL - Road safety resources (police.sa.gov.au)
My Licence - Safe driving tips - Alcohol and drugs
My Licence - The Driver's Handbook - Drugs, medicine and driving

Driving Interstate:
If you travel to live or work interstate you need to be aware of different state's rules. For example, if you are a driver in Western Australia, you are sent a letter once a year to take to your doctor so that he or she can sign off on whether or not you are fit to drive while on your medication.

For information on other states, go to: Medicines and driving | healthdirect

Work

Fly-in, fly-out jobs in mining are a good example of a workplace which involves complex and heavy machinery. As a result, workers can be regularly drug tested to ensure they are at their best and keep everyone safe.

Urine tests are easier than blood tests to check for drug use at work, so this is what most employers do.

Urine tests for workplace or sports reasons will pick up ADHD medication and test positive for amphetamines.

Because of this, it is normal to tell your future employer ahead of time about likely test results and provide a certificate or letter about your medication from your doctor.

Sport

Athletes may be required to use a normally prohibited drug (performance enhancing) to treat a valid medical issue, such as stimulants for ADHD.
Urine tests for workplace or sports reasons will pick up ADHD medication and test positive for amphetamines.

To be able to compete and still take their medication, the athlete needs to apply for a Therapeutic Use Exemption. This exemption permits an athlete to use a forbidden substance for therapeutic purposes only. Athletes apply for a Therapeutic Use Exemption through the Australian Sports Drug Medical Advisory Committee (ASDMAC).

For details go to:
Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE) | Sport Integrity Australia

About the Australian Sports Drug Medical Advisory Committee | Sport Integrity Australia