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Concerta: Benefits and Side Effects

By Jeannine Virtue

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by: **Jeannine Virtue**

A number of ADHD medications are hitting the market, joining the old Ritalin standby. Concerta, in its relatively short existence, has already grabbed a sizeable portion of the ADHD medication market share.

Although Concerta offers a number of advantages over the older ADHD medications, it also has several side effects that people with Attention Deficit and parents of Attention Deficit children should be aware of before administering this medication.

Concerta medication for ADHD and ADD is a once-daily treatment and, when introduced, was the first time-release formula. A modified version of Adderall, Adderall XR, followed with a time-released delivery system.

The Concerta capsule has an outer coat of medication that dissolves quickly and then two small compartments of medication inside that release gradually. The time-released system of the Concerta capsule provides up to 12-hour coverage and provides more even coverage for ADHD symptoms but there are a few drawbacks with the capsule form. If not taken early in the morning, manufacturers recommend skipping the dose for that day since the stimulants will affect normal sleep patterns. Some people find that, even with early morning dosing, Concerta significantly disrupts normal sleep patterns. Because of the tablet's non-deformable shell, the Concerta pill cannot be cut to decrease the dosage. This aspect causes trouble for people with Attention Deficit still working to find the best dosage levels or for those who wish to give their child a lower dose for half-days at school. Increasing or decreasing by any amount requires a new prescription. Parents cannot crush the tablet and mix with food for children who have difficulty swallowing pills since crushing the Concerta medication will also destroy the release mechanism. The Concerta shell does not completely digest and remnants of the Concerta tablet can often be seen in stools. Although most people's digestive systems can typically pass a wide variety of very interesting articles and does not typically pose a serious health hazard, Concerta is not recommended for people with gastrointestinal narrowing and digestive

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problems.

Concerta Side Effects:

Concerta side effects seem less pronounced than Ritalin and Dexedrine side effects. Although Concerta side effects are less pronounced than the older medications' side effects, the Concerta medication for ADD and ADHD still pose negative side effects, as do other ADHD medications.

Concerta Side Effects include: abdominal pain aggravation, nervousness, hostility, sadness drug dependence dizziness headache tics insomnia and prolonged sleepiness loss of appetite increased coughing, sinusitis, upper respiratory tract infection vomiting allergic reaction increased blood pressure psychosis (abnormal thinking or hallucinations).

Concerta should not be used by people with marked anxiety or agitation, glaucoma, or tics or during treatment with monoamine oxidase inhibitors.

The stimulant methylphenidate, also used in Ritalin, is the active ingredient in the Concerta medication for ADHD and ADD. The medical community has not yet determined the long-term effects of having methylphenidate in the bloodstream for prolonged hours every day for numbers of years.

In stating the potential for abuse and dependence on this drug, the Concerta manufacturer also instructs people to inform their doctor if their child has ever used or been dependent on alcohol or drugs, or if the child is now using or dependent on alcohol or drugs.

Concerta, along with all other ADHD medications currently on the market, is not recommended for children under the age of six since its safety and effectiveness has not been determined. Despite ADHD drug manufacturer's own labels warning against prescribing these powerful drugs to young children, doctors increasingly prescribe ADD medications to children under the manufacturer recommended age.

Parents should carefully consider the health effects of placing small children on medications for ADD and ADHD, even if the child's health care provider prescribes an medication for ADHD or ADD.

The Concerta medication is about 70 percent effective in decreasing the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder, which is about the same level of effectiveness to Ritalin, Adderall and Strattera.

Although the prevailing ADHD medications have about the same level of effectiveness on the general population, children and adults react differently to the different formulations. Ritalin might produce severe side effects while Concerta side effects might be minimal. Adderall side effects could present themselves differently than Strattera side effects.

People using ADHD medications know that these little pills are never the "cure-all" answer. Attention Deficit requires a multifaceted approach which requires many different tactics and combination of tactics. What works is highly individual, depending on individual needs.

Many people with Attention Deficit Disorder and parents of children with Attention Deficit Disorder find great Attention Deficit Disorder and ADHD success from diet supplementation – especially with amino acids and essential fatty acids – a shift in parenting tactics, modifying the home and school environment, biofeedback, neuro-linguistic programming, stress relief measures and exercise.

The greatest successes are found by being bold and trying a combination of many measures.

Jeannine Virtue is a freelance journalist and mother of an Attention Deficit Disorder son. Visit the Attention Deficit Disorder Help Center at

for effective drug-free

alternatives to Ritalin, Concerta and other ADHD medications.

The New ADHD Medications

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Pharmaceutical companies vying for Ritalin's hefty market share are coming up with new formulas and aggressive campaign ads to compete in this \$1 billion per year ADHD drug industry.

Pharmaceutical companies introduced five new drugs to treat ADHD in the past five years, with another ADHD drug expected on the market in early 2003 and more are being developed.

The relative newcomers Adderall and the drug Concerta are now joined by Metadate CD, Ritalin LA and Focalin. Another formula, Atomoxetine, should hit the market in just a few months.

The new ADHD drugs give people choosing drug therapy wider options. Yet, parents, doctors, the FDA and the DEA alike worry that the unprecedented marketing tactics will further drive up demand for ADHD medications, as well as increase drug abuse for these high powered drugs.

Ritalin enjoyed the ADHD corner market for decades. Adderall, with its longer acting formula, jumped in for its share in 1996 and quickly began chiseling at Ritalin's market share. The drug Concerta, a reformulation of Ritalin, followed in 2000. Then, Metadate CD and Focalin appeared. Not willing to lose its share in the market, Ritalin makers began developing new formulas, the first – Ritalin LA – reaching FDA approval in June. In late November the FDA approved Eli Lilly and Company's new ADHD formulation, Strattera (atomoxetine).

New ADHD formulas hitting the market is not all that surprising. After all, the market is wide open and growing. New prescriptions for Attention Deficit Disorder increased almost 40 percent over the past five years. Last year doctors wrote 20 million prescriptions for ADHD medications. More American children are diagnosed with Attention Deficit than in any other country in the world.

Concerta, Adderall, Metadate CD, Ritalin LA, Focalin all high potential for side effects, drug dependency and abuse and are closely related to illegal street drugs. Strattera is different in that this is the first non-stimulant medication.

It is ironic though that every day millions of children line up to the counter for their dose of meds while the person caught in possession of these drugs without a prescription face felony charges. These drugs cannot be good for young minds and young bodies.

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Of the less severe side effects, children might lose weight, have problems falling asleep, have decreased appetite, and temporarily grow more slowly while taking ADHD medications.

Other side effects can include cardiac arrhythmia, depression, psychosis, facial tics, liver damage, abuse and addiction. Some doctors also believe that some ADHD medications may also worsen the symptoms of Tourette's syndrome.

What's worse, ADHD medications do not always work, do not treat the core cause of Attention Deficit Disorder and could have long-term negative effects. Parents need to be clear about the benefits, as well as the potential side effects of ADHD medications.

Still, more than enough doctors willingly diagnose children as Attention Deficit and cut a prescription. More than enough parents willingly place their children on psychotropic drugs. More than enough teachers and school administrators encourage parents to "do the right thing for their child" to make their child more complaint in school.

The more surprising aspect of this wave of new ADHD medications is the aggressive marketing of narcotics straight to the consumer. ADHD drug makers stepped over a 30-year international treaty agreement not to advertise controlled substances that have high potential for abuse last year when they began marketing their magic pills.

These Schedule II controlled substances are of the most addictive and abused drugs that are still legal.

Full-page color advertisement for ADHD medications began splashing across the pages of women's magazines. Metadate CD, Adderall and Concerta ads show smiling children and their proud mothers touting the wonders of such ADHD medications.

Metadate CD, introduced in April, launched ads in nearly a dozen women's magazines this year. The Drug Enforcement Agency sent a cease-and-desist letter to the makers of Metadate CD after the ads appeared yet the pharmaceutical company insisted that it did no wrong.

The DEA closely watches ADHD medication prescriptions and its advertising. ADHD medications are most-stolen prescriptions and the most-abused legal drugs. According to the DEA, the drug thieves, drug dealers and drug abusers are almost always children.

Adderall and Concerta advertisements appeared in September, just in time for the back-to-school children. These companies did not name the product in the ad but listed a toll free number for parents to call if they wanted more information.

Concerta manufacturers also began airing 60-second ads on cable TV channels. For the first time ever, Schedule II drugs found their way to mainstream television marketing.

The public can expect continued advertising as drug makers attempt to convince the public that their medications are better than the rest. Thus far, the makers of Ritalin have not marketed directly to consumers.

Jeannine Virtue is a freelance journalist and mother of an Attention Deficit Disorder son. Visit Virtue's web site at www.add-adhd-help-center.com to learn about effective drug-free alternatives to ADHD medications.

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