What are the Medication Treatments for ADHD & SUD?

Nonstimulant options

(e.g., atomoxetine, guanfacine, clonidine, bupropion, and viloxazine)

- These medicines are recommended for Veterans with a SUD history.
- Nonstimulant medications are not controlled substances and do not have a risk of abuse or dependence.
- Common side-effects include drowsiness, decreased appetite, nausea, and headache.

Stimulant options

(e.g., lisdexamfetamine, methylphenidate) are not typically recommended for those with ADHD with SUD. However, in some cases they can be used but require careful monitoring.

- These medications are controlled substances and have the potential for abuse or dependence.
- Veterans with a SUD history may not be prescribed prescription stimulants, to decrease risks of misuse.
- Common side-effects: decreased appetite, trouble sleeping, abdominal pain or headache.

Stimulant safety

Ensure proper use of medications. Regular check-ins with clinicians and urine drug screens may be required.

What Are Some Common Myths About ADHD & SUD?

"ADHD isn't real, it's just laziness."
False! ADHD is a mental health condition.

"If you take ADHD medication, you'll develop a drug addiction."
False! When used properly, ADHD medication can be safe and helpful to treat symptoms.

While there is a risk, it affects less than 5% of people using ADHD medications. For most, medications can be used safely to treat ADHD.

"People with SUD just need more willpower."
False! SUD is a medical condition that requires treatment.

What Are Some Resources for Veterans & Family Members?

VA Substance use disorder program locator:
www.va.gov/directory/guide/SUD.asp

Non-VA Substance use disorder program locator:
findtreatment.gov/locator?sType=sa

Helplines and crisis intervention services:

Veterans Crisis Line: confidential and free support 24/7 - phone (dial 988, then press 1), online chat (www.veteranscrisisline.net), or text (838255)

VA Caregiver Support line:
1-855-260-3274

Understanding Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with Substance Use Disorder (SUD):

Information for Veterans & Their Family Members

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What is ADHD?

- ADHD is a mental health condition that causes issues with attention, focus, impulsivity, and hyperactivity.
- ADHD is typically first recognized in childhood and can often last into adulthood. This can affect work, relationships, and daily life.

What are Common Symptoms of ADHD in Adults?

- Trouble focusing, staying organized, and following through on tasks
- Impulsivity, restlessness, and trouble coping with stress
- Difficulty managing time, money, and responsibilities

What is SUD?

- SUD occurs when the use of alcohol, tobacco, prescription or non-prescription medications, or other substances (e.g., cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine) negatively impacts a person's health and daily life.
- SUD can begin at any age and may continue over time, affecting a person's health, relationship, work, and overall quality of life.

What are Common Signs of SUD?

- Increased reliance on substances for focus, stress relief, or energy
- Withdrawal symptoms when trying to cut back
- Negative impact on relationships, work, or health due to substance use

Why Do ADHD & SUD Often Occur Together?

Veterans with ADHD may use substances to cope with symptoms like impulsivity, low attention, or hyperactivity, or for other reasons such as self-medication, boosting focus, or social influences. One in five Veterans who have a mental health condition also experience SUD.

Why Does a Diagnosis Matter?

- Many Veterans with ADHD and SUD go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.
- Veterans may go years without realizing they have ADHD symptoms, with an average delay of 17 years before receiving treatment.
- ADHD is often mistaken for depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or anxiety.
  - Additionally, many mental health disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD) may also cause symptoms of inattention/distractibility.
- Substance use can mask or worsen ADHD symptoms.
- ADHD and SUD can both affect decision-making, impulse control, and emotions.

How Are ADHD & SUD Diagnosed?

ADHD and SUD are diagnosed through clinical interviews, symptom history, and/or rating scales administered by the clinician.
The clinician will rule out other medical conditions that can cause the same symptoms as ADHD, such as sleep disorders, mood disorders, and learning disabilities.

Where Can I Seek Help?

- VHA primary care and mental health clinicians are a great place to start.
- Substance use recovery programs that can also potentially address other mental health disorders, like ADHD, can be helpful.

How Do I Manage ADHD Symptoms Without Relying on Medications?

- Time management: Use calendars, reminders, and task lists.
- Organization: Keep important items in designated places.
- Reducing distractions: Use noise-canceling headphones; set up a structured workspace.
- Healthy habits: Regular exercise, proper sleep, and a balanced diet help with focus.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): A structured, evidence-based approach that's completed with a mental health clinician can be helpful. CBT helps improve attention, reduces impulsivity, and manage unhelpful thought patterns.