# Pharmacy Pearls

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## Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in Adults: Considerations for the Lifespan

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), one of the most common neuropsychiatric disorders found in children and adolescents, often persists into adulthood. Studies have found that the majority of patients diagnosed with ADHD in childhood continue to be significantly impaired as adults in terms of occupational, academic, and social functioning. This publication aims to describe diagnosis and evaluation of ADHD in adults, comorbidities to consider, psychosocial treatment of adults with ADHD, and additional resources available for consultation.

### 1 Key Steps for Diagnosis and Evaluation:

**Clinical Interview:**

- The clinical interview remains the bedrock of the adult ADHD diagnosis.
- Rating scales support the assessment and monitoring of symptom severity but do not establish the diagnosis alone.
- Collateral information is helpful when available.
- Neuropsychological testing is not routinely required for diagnosis.

### 2

**4 Core Features of ADHD in Adults**

1) Several symptoms present prior to age 12.
2) At least 5 symptoms of inattention or hyperactivity for at least 6 months:
    a. *Inattention:* procrastination, difficulty making decisions, poor time management, difficulty in organizing activities
    b. *Hyperactivity:* restlessness, verbosity, constant activity, a tendency to choose very active jobs
3) Clear interference with functioning in 2 or more settings
4) R/O other potential causes of inattention, hyeractivity, and/or impulsivity.

**Challenging diagnosis because:**

- Heterogeneous clinical nature of symptoms
- Overlap of symptoms with a number of other psychiatric conditions
- Shortcuts tend to occur more on the adult side than on the pediatric side

### 3

**Comorbidities:**

- Mood disorders (depression, bipolar, dysthymia): 19-37%
- Anxiety disorders: 25-50%
- Personality disorders: 10-20%
- Alcohol use disorder: 32-53%
- Other substances (THC, cocaine): 8-32%
- Nicotine and caffeine often overlooked
- Sleep problems (70-80%)

### 4 Treatment:

**Psychosocial Treatment of Adult ADHD**

- CBT approach to ADHD provides patients:
    - Coping skills
    - Improved functioning, relationships, and quality of life
    - Improved organizing, planning, and management of procrastination and avoidance
    - Improved concomitant mood, guilt, anxiety, and anger.
- 20-50% of adult ADHD patients are considered non-responders to medications (Wender 1998, Wilens et. Al. 2002)
- Responders show only 50% of core symptoms

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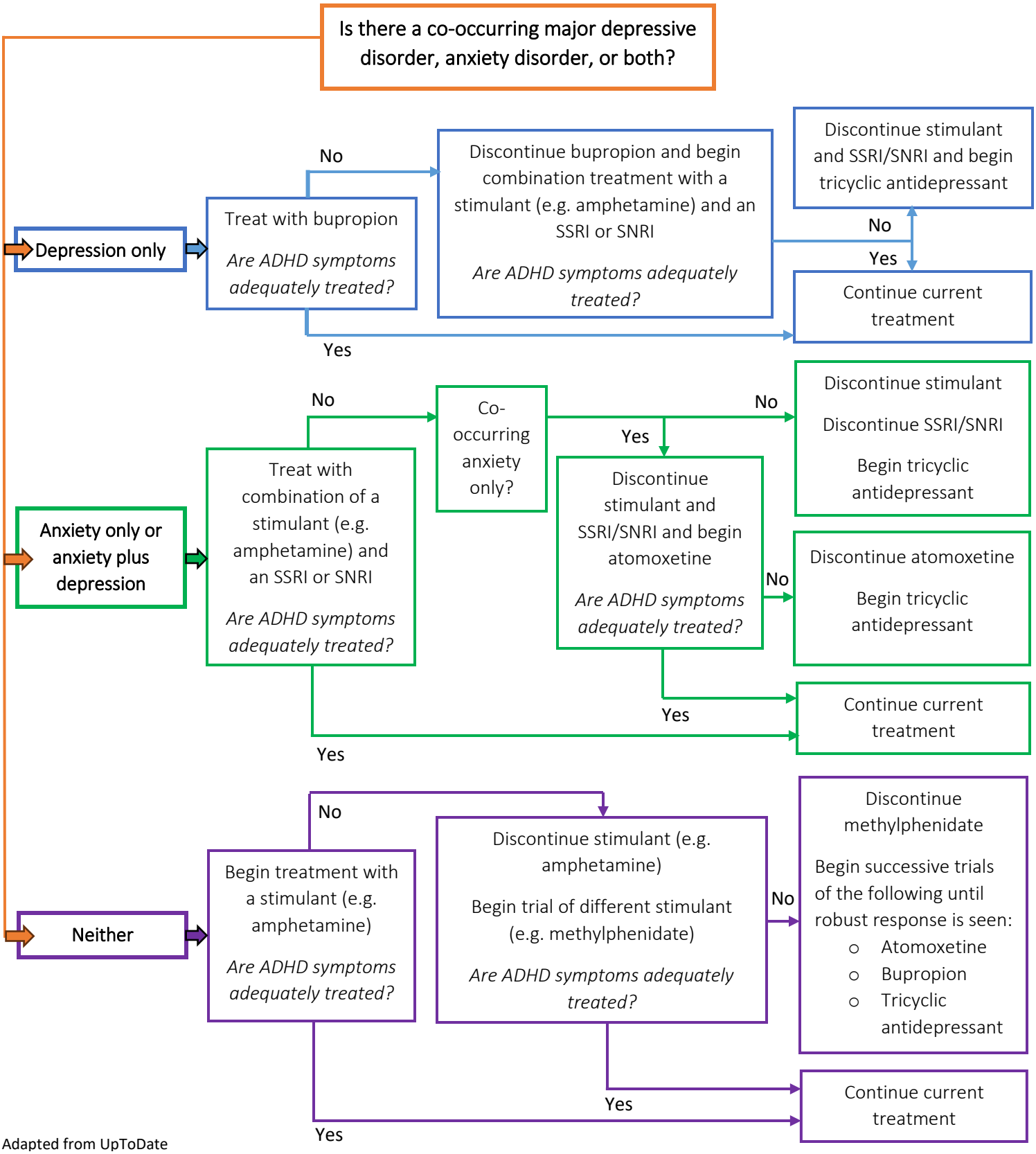
Management of ADHD in nonpregnant adults without a substance use disorder:




Adapted from UpToDate

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How to Contact the Behavioral Health Team at AHP

Email AHPBHIT@URMC.Rochester.edu for help with diagnostic clarification, additional input on medication considerations, and assistance with identifying appropriate specialty referrals.