

# OROS-methylphenidate to reduce ADHD symptoms in male prisoners aged 16–25 years: a RCT

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## Plain English summary

### OROS-methylphenidate for ADHD symptoms in male prisoners

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## Plain English summary

Around 20–30% of prisoners have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Stimulants such as methylphenidate reduce symptoms of ADHD; however, it is not clear whether or not prisoners with ADHD show the same beneficial effects. Differences may arise because problems with poor attention, restlessness or impulsive behaviour might be better explained by other mental health conditions or drug use, or because comorbid disorders might interfere with their response to methylphenidate.

This study investigates the effects of methylphenidate among young male offenders with undiagnosed or untreated ADHD. Participants were randomised to either osmotic release oral system (OROS) methylphenidate (a sustained release form of methylphenidate) or placebo during an 8-week trial. Participants and all investigators were blinded to the treatment given. Symptoms of ADHD, as well as 13 other measures, including emotional dysregulation, general mental health symptoms and prison reports of behaviour, were measured throughout the trial.

The trial found no evidence of a benefit of OROS-methylphenidate, compared with placebo, on any of the outcomes considered. This is perhaps surprising because the use of methylphenidate in the treatment of ADHD is well established. The reasons for this lack of evidence will require further research, but could be due to participants not taking sufficient medication, or the high rate of co-occurring mental health, social and drug use problems. It is also feasible that the prison environment influences the findings if prisoners feel that they need to please prison or health-care staff to shorten their sentences or gain privileges. The trial findings do not support the routine treatment with OROS-methylphenidate of ADHD in prisoners.



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