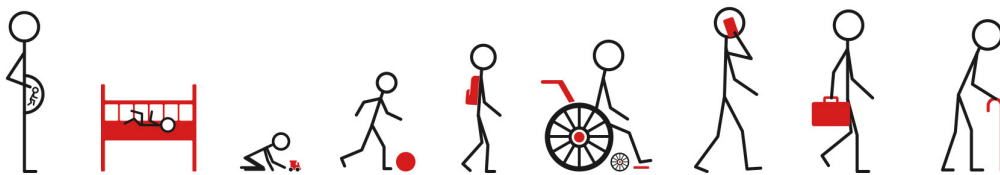


Guidelines for Cardiac Assessment Prior to Stimulant Medication in Children with ADHD

(Based on NICE NG87)

9th February 2026



Baseline Cardiovascular Assessment

According to NICE guideline NG87 on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), an electrocardiogram (ECG) is not routinely required before initiating stimulant medication in children. However, the clinician commencing medications should take a history, perform a basic cardiovascular assessment, and an ECG should be considered if there are specific risk factors.

Before starting stimulant medication, a cardiovascular assessment should include

- > A detailed medical history, focusing on any conditions that may contraindicate specific medications.
- > Current medication review.
- > Measurement of height and weight, plotted against normal ranges for age, height, and sex.
- > Baseline pulse and blood pressure, measured with an appropriately sized cuff and compared with normal ranges for age.
- > A general cardiovascular examination.

Indications for ECG or Cardiology Referral

Refer for a cardiology opinion before starting medication for ADHD if any of the following apply:

- > History of congenital heart disease or previous cardiac surgery.
- > History of sudden death in a *first-degree relative under 40 years* suggesting a cardiac disease (these patients should be referred to an inherited cardiac conditions service based on the history alone)
- > Shortness of breath on exertion compared with peers.
- > Fainting on exertion or in response to fright or noise.
- > Palpitations that are rapid, regular, and start and stop suddenly.
- > Chest pain suggesting cardiac origin.
- > Signs of heart failure.
- > A murmur heard on cardiac examination.
- > Blood pressure that is classified as hypertensive for adults.

Many of the children fitting into these groups may have already been referred to cardiology on the basis of symptoms alone and more detailed guidance on outpatient referral to paediatric cardiology can be found [here](#).

Additionally, refer to a paediatric hypertension specialist (typically nephrology) before starting medication if blood pressure is consistently above the 95th centile for age and height for children and young people.

Consideration of medication in a child with known cardiovascular disease

There is a three-fold increase in the incidence of ADHD in children and young people with congenital heart disease and medical treatment may be vital to the individual to maximise their potential in childhood.

When considering ADHD stimulant medication for a child with congenital heart disease or other significant cardiac conditions it is essential to follow a cautious, evidence-based approach. Most children will be under regular follow-up and review for the cardiac condition, where often recent investigations such as ECG and echo assessment are available. Please consult with the lead cardiologist for the patient around suitability and ongoing monitoring.

Summary

Routine ECG screening is not required for all children with ADHD prior to starting stimulant medication. However, if there are specific cardiovascular risk factors or symptoms, an ECG and further cardiology evaluation should be considered to ensure safe initiation of treatment.

References

1. **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Diagnosis and Management**, NICE Guideline NG87. Published 14th March 2018, updated in 2019 and 2025
[Overview | Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: diagnosis and management | Guidance | NICE](#)