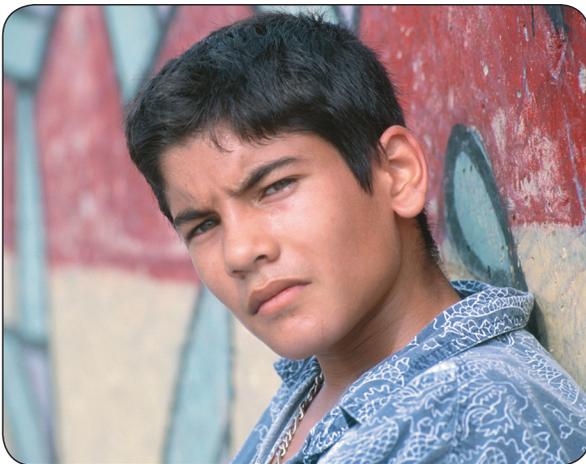


Mental Health Medications and Your Child

What You Need to Know

Fast Facts

- ◆ Mental health medications can help children and teens with mental health problems feel better and do better at home and school.
- ◆ Medications can have side effects. Some of these side effects are stomach problems, weight gain, high blood sugar, problems with muscle control, sleeping too much or too little, and suicidal thoughts.
- ◆ Everybody is different. How your child responds to medication depends on age, diagnosis, and body and brain chemistry.
- ◆ Preschoolers need a careful medical and mental health exam before starting a mental health medication.
- ◆ Many behavioral problems can be treated with counseling or therapy for both the child and the parents.



What does the research say?

- ◆ These days more and more youth are taking medications for mental health and behavior problems.
- ◆ The facts are not all in. Compared to adults, there is much less research on mental health medications in children and teens.
- ◆ Mental health medications should be given to preschoolers only if they have severe problems.
- ◆ Using several medications or high doses of medications in children and teens usually causes more side effects, and doesn't provide additional help with symptoms.
- ◆ Children and teens are even more likely to have side effects from medications than adults. Trouble with weight gain, blood sugar and cholesterol can start early. Some mental health medications have been shown to increase the risk of suicide.
- ◆ Many behavior problems can be treated without medication. Both children and their families can get help from counseling or therapy.

What do I need to know about my child and mental health medications?

- ◆ Make sure your child has a medical and mental health exam before starting any new mental health medication.
- ◆ Mental health medications should be avoided whenever possible in children under age 6.
- ◆ Your child should take the medication at the right dose and for a long enough time before making a change.
- ◆ Your child will respond better to the medicine if it is taken the way your doctor directs. Skipping doses will cause the medication to work less well. Giving extra doses can be dangerous for your child.
- ◆ Ask the doctor about any problems to look for in your child after starting medication.
- ◆ Always tell the doctor if you plan to change or stop your child's medication and work with the doctor to make a plan for careful follow-up.
- ◆ Counseling or therapy can help improve behavior, decrease sleep problems, reduce anger, and manage symptoms.

How should I talk to my child's doctor?

You can work with your child's doctor to find a treatment that really helps your child.

Important questions are:

- ◆ What is my child's diagnosis?
- ◆ How will mental health medication help my child?
- ◆ What side effects could my child feel?
- ◆ Is my child taking any high doses of medication? If yes, ask why.
- ◆ Is my child taking more than one mental health medication? If yes, ask why.
- ◆ What are the long-term health risks of my child's medication?
- ◆ Are there treatments besides medication that might help my child?
- ◆ What can I do at home to help control my child's mental health problem?



More Resources

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP):

www.aacap.org

American Psychiatric Association (APA):

www.psych.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI):

www.nami.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:

www.samhsa.gov

How the New York State Office of Mental Health is Helping

The New York State Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH) has teamed up with your providers to improve your child's mental health care so that your child can get the best treatment possible. For more information about the NYSOMH mental health prescribing quality improvement project, or to download copies of this brochure, go to: www.psyckes.org

The NYSOMH's Division of Child and Family Services has established the New York Child and Adolescent Telepsychiatry (NYCAT) program to provide additional resources for youth with behavioral health concerns. Consultation and educational support is available to many youth in the state. NYCAT is a key component of the NYSOMH's goal to increase access to appropriate and effective services.

For more information, talk to your provider or go to:

www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/nycat