

Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*
Medication Management in Children and Adolescents
Information for Parents/Families

Definition

Psychiatric medications are any medications used to treat a mental health disorder (for example, ADHD, Depression). Medications under the prescription of a treating medical professional and when taken as prescribed, along with the other non-medication interventions, can be important elements in the successful treatment of psychiatric disorders. Medications can help to control symptoms, make other kinds of treatment more effective, and most importantly, may help to reduce the barriers to learning and enhance school and life success.

Some facts to know

- **Medications do not cure psychiatric disorders** – Medications may not cure psychiatric disorders, but in many cases, along with other non-medication interventions (therapy, parent and teacher support), they can help a child or adolescent function despite continuing mental distress and difficulty coping effectively.
- **Length of treatment depends on the individual and the disorder** – Some children may only need to take medication for a set time period and then never need it again, while others may have to take medication for longer periods of time.
- **Medications may not produce the same effect in everyone** – Some children may respond better to one medication than another, often due to factors such as age, sex, body size, body chemistry, physical illnesses, diets and other treatments. Some may need larger doses versus smaller doses; some may have side effects, while others may have no side effects; some may experience minimal symptom relief as opposed to having complete symptom relief.
- **Good reports from families and teachers** – Families and teachers often report that a combination of medication and therapy have allowed their child to participate in school much like other children, along with improved functioning at home.
- **Only used when benefits outweigh the risks** – Medications should be used only when the anticipated benefits outweigh the risks.
- **It is not unusual for children/adolescents to require changes in dosages** and/or medications over time. It is important to regularly monitor the impact of medications.

Why do we care?

- Although many children and adolescents with mental health disorders can be very successful in life by utilizing non-medication interventions only (individual, group, or family therapy, parent and teacher support), medications may also be a factor that may help in the treatment of a mental health disorder or it may help to make these other forms of treatments more effective.
- Without proper identification and treatment, mental health disorders in childhood may have serious consequences, such as school failure, family conflicts, problems with relationships, problems developing social skills, substance abuse, delinquency, and even risk for accidental injuries and death.
- As with any intervention, a case-by-case decision-making process is necessary depending on your child's diagnosis and individual needs. The decision to medicate should be made solely by the child's parents or caregivers, and a medical professional experienced in diagnosing and treating childhood disorders.

What can we do about it?

If you are wondering if medication can help your child or adolescent, talk to a medical professional about medication management.

- **What happens next:**
 - The medical professional will be able to educate you on possible medications for your child, other treatments available, the risks and potential side effects (short-term and long-term), what the research shows regarding specific medications, how and when to take medication, and answer any other questions you may have.
 - If you decide that you would like your child to try medication, then the medical professional will need to know your child's medical history, other medications being taken, and life plans.
 - Your child will then begin by taking a trial of the medication while being monitored closely by you and your medical professional.
- **Some helpful questions to ask the medical professional:**
 - What is the name of the medication, and what is it supposed to do?
 - How and when will my child take it, and when does he/she stop taking it?
 - What foods, drinks, or other medications should my child avoid while taking the prescribed medications?
 - Should it be taken with food or on an empty stomach?
 - What are the side effects, and what should I do if they occur?
 - Is there any written information available about the medication?
 - Does it cost anything?

If you decide that the school nurse should be aware that your child is on medication, be sure that she/he knows the procedures for taking this medication as well as the side effects and what to do if they should occur.

- **After your child begins medication management:**
 - Monitor your child to make sure he/she is actually taking the proper medication dosage on the correct schedule.
 - Keep in touch with the medical professional who prescribed the medication to your child. Discuss with him/her the favorable results as well as any negative side effects.
 - Active monitoring by all caretakers (parents, teachers, and others who are in charge of this child) is highly recommended; however, it is up to you and your child whether to notify others about your child taking medication. It is often helpful if others are aware so as to report favorable results, any side effects, and to also monitor the administration of the medication.

Key Resources/Links

1. **National Institute of Mental Health** – This webpage/printable booklet is designed to help mental health patients and their families understand how and why medications can be used as part of the treatment of mental health problems. It also offers a children's medication chart that lists brand and generic names of medications under each of the main childhood disorders.
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/medicate.cfm>
2. **U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institute of Health (Medline Plus)** – The website offers an alphabetical list of drugs, supplements, and herbal information. It also provides you with an explanation of why this medication is prescribed, how this medicine should be used, precautions, side effects, storage conditions for the medicine, brand names, and other important information. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html>

3. **The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools – Psychotropic Drugs and Children: Use, Trends, and Implications for Schools.** This brochure discusses the use of psychotropic medications specific to the school population.
<http://www.healthinschools.org/Health-in-Schools/Health-Services/School-Health-Services/School-Health-Issues/ADD/Psychotropic-Drugs-and-Children.aspx>
4. **American Academy of child and Adolescent Psychiatry** – These articles discuss psychiatric medication for children and adolescents specific to how medications are used, types of medications, and questions to ask when becoming educated on medication management.
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/psychmed.htm> and
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/29.htm> and
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/medquest.htm>
5. **National Institute of Mental Health (Your Child and Medication)** – This article tells parents what you need to know about your child’s medications.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0651/is_2000_Feb_3/ai_70363309
6. **Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)** – This website offers information detailed information regarding AD/HD. <http://www.chadd.org/>
7. **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)** – This article is specific to antidepressant medication management for children and adolescents with depression. http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/antidepressant_child.cfm
8. **The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD)** - seeks to increase research and greater public understanding and awareness of the needs of children and adults with mental illness and emotional disorders. www.mhamd.org

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