

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 51

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PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATION FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS PART III: QUESTIONS TO ASK

Medication can be an important part of treatment for some psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents. Psychiatric medication should only be used as one part of a comprehensive treatment plan. Ongoing evaluation and monitoring by a physician is essential. Parents and guardians should be provided with complete information when psychiatric medication is recommended as part of their child's treatment plan. Children and adolescents should be included in the discussion about medications, using words they understand. By asking the following questions, children, adolescents, and their parents will gain a better understanding of psychiatric medications:

1. What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names?
2. What is known about its helpfulness with other children who have a similar condition to my child?
3. How will the medication help my child? How long before I see improvement? When will it work?
4. What are the side effects which commonly occur with this medication?
5. What are the rare or serious side effects, if any, which can occur?
6. Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?
7. What is the recommended dosage? How often will the medication be taken?
8. Are there any laboratory tests (e.g. heart tests, blood test, etc.) which need to be done before my child begins taking the medication? Will any tests need to be done while my child is taking the medication?
9. Will a child and adolescent psychiatrist be monitoring my child's response to medication and make dosage changes if necessary? How often will progress be checked and by whom?
10. Are there any other medications or foods which my child should avoid while taking the medication?

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11. Are there interactions between this medication and other medications (prescription and/or over-the-counter) my child is taking?
12. Are there any activities that my child should avoid while taking the medication? Are any precautions recommended for other activities?
13. How long will my child need to take this medication? How will the decision be made to stop this medication?
14. What do I do if a problem develops (e.g. if my child becomes ill, doses are missed, or side effects develop)?
15. What is the cost of the medication (generic vs. brand name)?
16. Does my child’s school nurse need to be informed about this medication?

Treatment with psychiatric medications is a serious matter for parents, children and adolescents. Parents should ask these questions **before** their child or adolescent starts taking psychiatric medications. Parents and children/adolescents need to be fully informed about medications. If, after asking these questions, parents still have serious questions or doubts about medication treatment, they should feel free to ask for a second opinion by a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

For additional information see: *Your Child* (Harper Collins 1998). *Your Adolescent* (Harper Collins 1999) and *Facts for Families: #21 Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents Part I-How Medications Are Used, #29 Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents Part II- Types of Medications, #52 Comprehensive Psychiatric Evaluation.*

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The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 7,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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