

# **Kids and Medicine... What you should know.**

Prepared by:  
Sue Blaha, RN  
Cape Cod Collaborative  
January 2008

# Special drugs for special kids...

The use of medication therapy as a front-line treatment for children with emotional and behavioral special needs is constantly changing. Life for these children, and their care givers, can be greatly enhanced through the knowledgeable, humane and careful use of psychotherapeutic medications.

These medications will not “cure” a particular disorder, but they can reduce the frequency and intensity of associated affective and behavioral disturbances including:

- agitation
- anxiety
- mood instability
- hyperactivity
- impulsiveness
- aggression
- self-injury
- repetitive, stereotypic and compulsive behaviors

Lots of drugs are used, all kinds:

- Antidepressants (Prozac, Trazadone, Celexa...)
- Antipsychotics (Risperdal, Seroquel, Abilify...)
- Stimulants (Adderall, Ritalin, Focalin...)
- Antianxiety drugs (Ativan, BuSpar...)
- Anticonvulsants (Depakote, Trileptal...)
- Others (Clonidine...)

We'll just call all of them- psychotherapeutic medications- it's easier!

As with all medications, side effects can and do occur. The patient, parent and physician need to weigh the benefits and the risks. A parent or teacher is often the first person to notice new side effects. All medications come with a detailed side effect list. Make yourself familiar with this.

Some common side effects and practical solutions:

- Dry mouth (Chew sugarless gum, hard candies)
- Constipation (Increase fiber and fluids, exercise)
- Weight gain (Exercise, diet)
- Sun sensitivity (Sun block, clothing and planning)
- Stomach upset (Take with or without food as directed)

Don't try to correct side effects by changing the dosage or abruptly stopping any of these medications. Talk to your doctor first!

# Medications...

## Questions to consider...

### Ask the right ones!

- What is the name of the medication?
- How will this medication help my child?
- Do I need to do anything before giving this medication to my child?
- How much of the medication do I give my child?
- At what times of the day should I give the medication to my child?
- How long does my child have to take the medication?
- Should my child avoid certain foods or activities while using this medication?
- Should my child avoid other medications, herbal products or supplements while using this medication?
- Are there any side effects I should know about?
- Is there anything unusual about how my child is taking this medication (for example, is it a larger than usual dose)?
- Does this medication come in other forms that may be easier for my child to take, such as chewable tablets or liquid?
- Can this prescription be refilled? How many times?
- What do I do if my child misses a dose?
- What do I do if I give my child too much?
- What if my child spits out the medication?
- Can you show me how to use this medication?

Many less expensive medications are available in less expensive forms than brand-name preparations. Often these non-brand-name medications can be used instead of brand-name medications. Other times it is more important to use the brand-name. Ask your pediatrician.

Ask as many questions as you need. If more questions arise, call your pediatrician's office or call your pharmacist. If your child is old enough, make sure he understands what he must do as well.

# Kids aren't just small adults...

Use care when giving ANY medication to an infant or child. Even over-the-counter (OTC) medicines that you buy are serious medicines. The following is advice for giving OTC medicine to your child, from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the makers of OTC medicines:

1. **ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW THE DRUG FACTS LABEL ON YOUR OTC MEDICINE.** Read the label every time, before you give the medicine. Be sure to clearly understand how much medicine to give and when the medicine can be taken again.
2. **KNOW THE ACTIVE INGREDIENT IN YOUR CHILD'S MEDICINE.** This is what makes the medicine work and is always listed at the top of the Drug Facts label. Sometimes an active ingredient can treat more than one medical condition. For that reason, the same active ingredient can be found in many different medicines that are used to treat different symptoms. For example, a medicine for a cold and a medicine for a headache could each contain the same active ingredient. So, if you're treating a cold and a headache with two medicines and both have the same active ingredient, you could be giving two-times the normal dose.
3. **GIVE THE RIGHT MEDICINE, IN THE RIGHT AMOUNT, TO YOUR CHILD.** Not all medicines are right for an infant or a child. Medicines with the same brand name can be sold in many different strengths, such as infant, child and adult strengths.
4. **TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR, PHARMACIST OR NURSE TO FIND OUT WHAT MIXES WELL AND WHAT DOESN'T.** Medicines, vitamins, supplements, foods and beverages don't always mix well with each other. Your healthcare professional can help.
5. **USE THE PROPER DOSING TOOL THAT COMES WITH THE MEDICINE.** A different dosing tool or the kitchen spoon could hold the wrong amount of medicine.
6. **KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TABLESPOON (tbsp.) AND A TEASPOON (tsp.).** Do not confuse them! A tablespoon holds three times as much medicine as a teaspoon. On measuring tools, a teaspoon (tsp.) is equal to "5 cc" or "5 ml".
7. **KNOW YOUR CHILD'S WEIGHT.** Directions for some medications are based on weight. Don't go by age or try to guess the weight.
8. **PREVENT A POISON EMERGENCY BY ALWAYS USING A CHILD RESISTANT CAP.** Relock the cap after each use. Be especially careful with any products that contain iron; they are the leading cause of poisoning deaths in young children.
9. **STORE ALL MEDICATIONS IN A SAFE PLACE.** Today's medicines are tasty, colorful and many can be chewed. Kids may think that these products are candy. To prevent an overdose or poisoning emergency, store all medicines and vitamins in a safe place out of your child's (and

10. **STORE THE MEDICATION PROPERLY.** Keep them in a cool, dark and dry place. Avoid window sills and hot, steamy bathrooms.
11. **CHECK THE MEDICINE THREE TIMES.** First, check the outside packaging for such things as cuts, slices or tears. Second, once you are at home, check the label inside the package to be sure you have the right medicine. Make sure the lid and seal are not broken. Third, check the color, shape, size and smell of the medicine. If you notice anything different or unusual, talk to your pharmacist or other health care professional.

## Remember the "5" Rights...

The right patient

The right medication

The right dosage

The right time

The right route

Information for this document was provided by Consumer Healthcare Products Association and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Thank you.

# Finally...

## A note from the nurse!

Actually administering medications to kids can sometimes be a challenge! You may find that a child hates the taste and spits out the medicine or refuses to swallow it. Try adding a little sugar or juice (not honey) to the dosing advice to make it taste better. Applesauce or jelly (especially apple jelly) can be helpful. However, do not combine medications with milk or try to mix them into a bowl of cereal. These may effect the medication's active ingredient and limit absorption. Your child may only eat part, or it may settle to the bottom and never get into his/her mouth.

Older children may be more willing to take chewable tablets than liquid medicines. Praise and firm directives can help. Sometimes just building this into their schedule helps. It is helpful to have medications "ready to go" at medication time. This indicates that this is "med time", not the time for anything else-just get down to business!

Lastly, we encourage you to administer any medications at home, if possible. However, medication administration is sometimes needed during the school day. To do this in the school setting...Please have written permission from both the doctor as well as the parent. All schools have the needed medication authorization forms available. No medications, OTC or prescription medications, can be given without written authorization. In addition, please remember that all medications must be brought to school by the parent. No medications can be sent to school with the child for obvious reasons.

An extra tip...

Use the website and publications that the nurses do. Here's a few...

[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) (U.S. Food and Drug Administration)

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org) (Kids Health)

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) (American Academy of Pediatrics)

[www.chpa-info.org](http://www.chpa-info.org) (Consumer Healthcare Products Association)

The Physician's Desk Reference

# Medicine Cabinet Clean Out...

Setting aside some time to clean out the medicine cabinet is a great idea. Maybe every six months or so, maybe around the times we move our clocks back or ahead or at the beginning of each new season. What ever time you choose, jot it down on your calendar so you won't forget.

Searching your medicine cabinet you're likely to find expired medications, medications that are not in child proof containers, half-used medications and medications that are simply not used anymore. You can make your medicine cabinet a little safer by getting rid of them.

In addition to old medications, scan your medicine cabinets to make sure you are keeping your kids safe from old advice. That likely means getting rid of:

- **Syrup of Ipecac-** The American Academy of Pediatrics no longer recommends that parents keep it in their homes.
- **Mercury thermometers-** Since they can break, exposing your child to the mercury and mercury vapors.
- **Hydrogen peroxide-** A recommendation to get rid of hydrogen peroxide may surprise you, but keep in mind that many experts believe that hydrogen peroxide isn't any more helpful than regular soap and water when cleaning a simple wound, and that hydrogen peroxide may actually be damaging to healthy skin cells.
- **Baby aspirin-** You only have to get rid of aspirin or baby aspirin if it's in your child's medicine cabinet. Remember, that because of the risk of Reye Syndrome, you shouldn't usually give your child, or even your teenager, aspirin.

In general, you should not have any leftover prescription medicine after your child finishes medical treatment for an illness such as an ear infection or strep throat. If you do, either you didn't give your child all the medicine or the pharmacy gave you too much. Always complete the prescribed treatment and never keep the extra.

Once you have decided which medications to get rid of, you should have a plan on what to do with them. Should you throw them in the trash or flush them? No way! Contact your pharmacy for proper disposal in your area.

The above information was taken from  
About.com Pediatrics. Thank you.