



The CAMESA guidelines provide parents and doctors with information about the side effects of antipsychotic drugs in children.

Why are antipsychotic medications prescribed to children?

Antipsychotic medications are prescribed to children to treat disorders including aggressive behaviour with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; oppositional defiant and conduct disorders; irritability with autism spectrum disorders; tic disorders; bipolar disorder; and schizophrenia and psychotic disorders.

Which medications are most commonly prescribed?

Today, newer antipsychotic medications, called Second Generation Antipsychotic medications, are the most common type of antipsychotic medication prescribed to children. The generic names for these medications are risperidone, olanzapine, quetiapine, aripiprazole, clozapine, ziprasidone and paliperidone. Depending on which company makes the medication, there may be a different brand name as well.

What are potential side effects of these medications?

Second Generation Antipsychotic medications are often effective in treating the condition for which they were prescribed. However, side effects may occur. They include weight gain, increased waist size, increased blood glucose and insulin levels, elevated blood cholesterol and/or triglyceride levels, altered prolactin and thyroid hormone levels and involuntary movements. These are only possible side effects and may not occur in your child. Regardless, it is important to be aware of what to watch for when your child is taking any of these medications.

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How does a physician test for medication safety?

When your child is prescribed a Second Generation Antipsychotic medication, the physician will typically assess your child's disorder on a regular basis. Your child's physician will want to know the severity of your child's symptoms, if the medication is working, and if there are any side effects. To monitor for potential medication side effects, your child's physician will usually monitor your child's height, weight, waist circumference and blood pressure.

Your child's physician may also conduct a brief neurological exam and order blood work. The neurological exam assesses for potential side effects such as involuntary movements. The type and timing of blood work depends on the medication your child is taking. Blood work may include testing blood glucose, insulin, cholesterol, triglyceride, prolactin and thyroid hormone levels. How often this monitoring is conducted will depend on the status of your child's disorder, side effects your child may be experiencing, and for how long your child has taken the medication. For information about the type and timing of specific physical examinations and blood tests recommended by the CAMESA guidelines, please visit our website.

If you think your child is experiencing a drug-related side effect, you should contact the prescribing physician.

Why is it important for your child to be monitored?

Early identification of side effects related to the use of antipsychotic medications may help decrease the severity of these side effects and prevent long-term complications.

What should you do if your child experiences a side effect?

If you think your child is experiencing a drug-related side effect, you should contact the prescribing physician. Antipsychotic medications should not be abruptly discontinued.



Is your child taking an antipsychotic medication?

Monitoring the safety of antipsychotic medications in children:
Information you can use to help keep your child safe

Further information

If you have any concerns about the medication your child is taking, it is important that you discuss them with your child's physician. Your pharmacist is also a valuable resource.

About this brochure

The content of this brochure was developed by Tracy Hammer, Nancy Labelle and Tamara Pringsheim of the Alberta Children's Hospital.

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About CAMESA

The Canadian Alliance for Monitoring Effectiveness and Safety of Antipsychotic Medications in Children is a group of physicians and researchers supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. We are dedicated to improving the quality of life of children and families through the practice of evidence-based medicine and promoting drug safety.