

Determining when to use Medication TIP Sheet

Why Use Medication?

Determining whether or not to use medication can be a difficult decision. It is a decision that should be made after:

- Clearly understanding about autism and common behaviour problems
- Consulting with your doctor, behaviour team and school. Only your health care provider can prescribe medication.
- Learning about the possible benefits and risks of using medication
- Understanding what is important to you, your family and child when deciding to use medication

Symptoms that can be effectively treated with medication:

Medication does not cure autism. It can be used to treat specific symptoms, but this should always be done in combination with education and behaviour therapy. Be sure to work with your health care provider to rule out any potential medical problems that may be impacting behaviour. Examples may include: allergies, dental needs, gastrointestinal issues, etc.

Some specific symptoms that may be affected by use of medication include (but are not limited to):

- Hyperactivity: This is often characterized by high activity level, restlessness, fidgeting, etc.
- Short attention span
- Impulsivity: This is often characterized as acting without thinking
- Repeated thoughts: This is often characterized by thinking about the same thing over and over
- Sleep problems: This can include either difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Anxiety: This is often characterized by worrying too much or being overly fearful
- Depression: This is often characterized by ongoing sadness or low energy

Pros and Cons of Using Medication:

Reasons to Use Medication:	Reasons against Using Medication:
May effectively treat the symptom that is being targeted	Does not cure autism
Child or youth may function better at home, school or in the community	Requires structure of being given daily at the same time every day (or multiple times per day)
Child or youth, and family may sleep better	Risk of potential side effects
Child or youth may be less irritable, or have improved focus therefore being able to experience their community more or be able to learn better	Requires ongoing monitoring to determine effectiveness or side effects
May decrease family stress	Medications can be expensive
May see improvements in mood	Requires ongoing monitoring with health care provider
	May not work effectively for your child

Making a Decision:

- Discuss your concerns (including those from school and behaviour team) with your health care provider. Learn about possible medications that may be prescribed, including possible benefits and risks.
- Discuss pros and cons with your family
- Monitor the specific behaviour that you are targeting BEFORE you start medication so you know how frequently it is occurring, how long it last or how sever it is.
- Be an effective advocate for your child or youth. Ask questions and ensure you have all the information that you need before starting a medication.

Monitoring Effectiveness:

Once you have committed to trying medication, it requires ongoing monitoring. The time that medication is given may need to be changed or dosages may need adjusting. Ongoing monitoring allows for an objective view of the effectiveness.

Autism Speaks Toolkits

Autism Speaks Toolkits. Should my child take medicine for challenging behaviour? Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/medication-guide>

Autism Speaks Toolkits. Autism and Medication: Safe and Careful Use. Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.ca/science-and-family-services/resources/tool-kits/autism-and-medicine-safe-and-careful-use1/>