

Research Finds Ritalin's Benefits in Treating Children with Autism

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(PhysOrg.com) -- UA researchers present evidence that the Ritalin is effective in treating preschoolers with Autism in a first-ever clinical trial to test the medication's efficacy with children with the disorder.

Dr. Jaswinder K. Ghuman, associate professor of psychiatry and pediatrics with the University of Arizona College of Medicine, and her colleagues, broke new ground with the first ever randomized-control trial of methylphenidate (Ritalin) treatment in preschool [children](#) with [Autism Spectrum Disorder](#), known as ASD.

The study's results were published in the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology*, and were selected as the feature paper by the journal's editors.

Recently, increasingly higher rates of autism are being reported in the United States.

The most recent Center for Disease Control Autism Surveillance Project estimates that 1 in 150 children in the United States have an ASD.

Symptoms of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, or [ADHD](#), are very common in children with ASD. ADHD symptoms in children with ASD interfere with performing well in school and achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones.

Methylphenidate and other stimulant medications are commonly used to

treat ADHD in children, including preschool-age children.

Unfortunately, there is a serious lack of information regarding the safety and efficacy of these medications in preschool-age children.

Ghuman and her colleagues found that the preschoolers with ASD showed modest improvement and 50 percent responded positively to methylphenidate.

Methylphenidate response in the preschool participants was more subtle and variable compared to typically-developing ADHD children.

Nevertheless, parents were able to detect methylphenidate effects and were pleased with the change in their children's behavior, however modest it might have been; and more than 71 percent of the parents wanted their child to continue taking methylphenidate at the end of the study.

Preschoolers with ASD were sensitive to the side effects of methylphenidate, tolerated lower doses, required a slower rate of titration, and needed close monitoring for side effects.

The frequency and type of side effects were similar to the side effects seen with older children with ASD and preschoolers with intellectual disability.

"Our research shows that preschoolers with ASD and ADHD can benefit from a trial with methylphenidate," said Ghuman. "However, both children with ASD and [preschool](#) children with ADHD are more sensitive to methylphenidate [side effects](#). Hence, preschoolers should be monitored closely and methylphenidate dose should be increased slowly and carefully."

Provided by University of Arizona ([news](#) : [web](#))

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