

Children with autism frequently receive psychotropic medications

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Behavioral interventions typically are the first line of treatment to manage unwanted behaviors in children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). If behaviors do not improve, medications frequently are added to the mix.

Research conducted by Autism Speaks' Autism Treatment Network (ATN) shows that use of psychotropic medications is common among [children](#) with ASD, with 27 percent of those enrolled in the network registry receiving at least one medication to manage their behavior. The most common reasons for medication use were hyperactivity, repetitive behaviors, irritability and attentional concerns.

Results of the study, and three others conducted by the ATN, will be presented Sunday, May 2 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

An estimated one in 110 U.S. children has autism, a group of complex developmental brain disorders that affect behavior, social skills and communication.

Although the [Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA) has approved only two medications to treat certain symptoms seen in ASD, many other medications are used to treat a variety of symptoms exhibited by these children.

ATN researchers sought to identify which medicines are prescribed for

children on the autism spectrum and how frequently they are used. The ATN, which includes 14 treatment and research centers in the United States and Canada, enrolls patients ages 2-18 years with a diagnosis of autism, Asperger's syndrome or pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).

Medication data were available for 415 children in the registry. Results showed that 112 (27%) were receiving at least one psychotropic medication for their behavior. Of these 112 children, 46% were taking two or more medications.

In addition, medication use was more common in older children: 60 percent of youths ages 11 and older took at least one medication compared to 44 percent of children ages 6-10 years, 11 percent of those ages 3-5 and 4 percent of children younger than 3.

The most common medications prescribed were stimulants, which are used to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Symptoms of ADHD are among the most common problem behaviors reported by parents of children on the autism spectrum.

Risperidone, an atypical antipsychotic, also was prescribed frequently. The FDA has approved risperidone for the treatment of irritability, including aggression, temper tantrums, self-injurious behavior and quickly changing moods associated with ASD.

"Additional research to better define which children with ASD and to identify which specific symptoms respond best to which medication would improve treatment decisions for this population," said Daniel Coury, MD, medical director of the ATN and professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at The Ohio State University.

Autism Speaks' Autism Treatment Network (ATN) is the first network

of hospitals and physicians dedicated to developing a model of comprehensive medical care for children and adolescents with autism. The ATN offers families care from doctors highly experienced in helping individuals with [autism](#) and providing treatment for associated conditions such as gastrointestinal and sleep disorders, while disseminating best practices to the greater medical community.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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