

Study shows blood pressure drug can reduce anxiety for people with autism

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A new study at the University of Missouri's Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment has found that propranolol, a medication that treats high blood pressure, can also help lower anxiety for kids and

young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The work is [published](#) in the journal *Psychopharmacology*.

Given that some individuals with ASD tend to struggle with anxiety at a far greater rate than their neurotypical peers, the new finding can significantly help such individuals with ASD. David Beversdorf, a [clinician](#) at the Thompson Center, led the study, which involved 69 patients over a three-year span. Compared to a [placebo group](#), the participants who received propranolol showed significantly reduced anxiety levels at their 12-week check-up appointments while receiving the medication. The study also examined whether there were significant changes in the individuals' social communication skills, but no significant changes were found.

"The findings show that propranolol could serve as a helpful intervention for reducing anxiety for individuals with autism," said Beversdorf, who also has appointments in the MU School of Medicine and the MU College of Arts and Science. "This drug has been around since the 1960s and is very inexpensive. Up until now, we haven't had any known drugs that target psychiatric issues specifically for [individuals](#) with autism, so these results are very promising and can support future research."

As a practicing clinician, Beversdorf has seen firsthand the positive benefits propranolol can have in improving the overall quality of life for some patients with ASD and their families.

"As researchers, we try our best to improve the lives of our patients, and it feels rewarding to help out," said Beversdorf, who is a professor of radiology, neurology and psychological sciences as well as the William and Nancy Thompson Endowed Chair in Radiology. "I went into the field of neurology knowing I wanted to try to find new treatment options and interventions to benefit people with autism."

"Randomized controlled trial of propranolol on social communication and anxiety in children and [young adults](#) with [autism spectrum disorder](#)," was recently published in *Psychopharmacology*.

More information: David Q. Beversdorf et al, Randomized controlled trial of propranolol on social communication and anxiety in children and young adults with autism spectrum disorder, *Psychopharmacology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s00213-023-06452-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00213-023-06452-1)

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