

Kids and Medication: Ask the Right Questions

One in ten children deals with an emotional problem such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, or anxiety, which can cause unhappiness for a kid as well as problems at home, at play, and at school.

If you are planning to bring your child to a doctor, always provide a record of your child's medical problems, medications your child is taking, including over-the-counter medications or vitamin and herbal supplements, and any allergic reactions your child has suffered. If a medication is prescribed for your child, there are certain questions you should ask. Bring a pen and paper along so you can take notes.

- What is the name of the medication and how will it help my child? Is the medicine available in both brand name and generic versions, and is it all right to use the less expensive (generic) medication? What is the name of the generic version? Is it all right to switch among brands, or between brand name and generic forms?
- What is the proper dosage for my child? Is the dose likely to change as he or she grows?
- What if my child has a problem with the pill or capsule? Is it available in a chewable tablet or liquid form?
- How many times a day must the medicine be given? Should it be taken with meals or on an empty stomach? Should the school give the medication during the day?
- How long must my child take this medication? If it is discontinued, should it be done all at once or slowly?
- Will my child be monitored while on this medication and, if so, by whom?
- Should my child have any laboratory tests before taking this medication? Will it be necessary to check blood levels or perform other tests while my child is taking this medication?
- Should my child avoid certain foods, other medications, or activities while using this medication?
- Are there possible side effects? If I notice a side effect — unusual sleepiness, agitation, fatigue, hand tremors — should I notify the doctor at once?
- What if my child misses a dose or spits it up?
- How well established and accepted is the use of this medication in children or adolescents?