

Antipsychotic Drugs for Children and Adolescents: **What You Should Know**

What are antipsychotic drugs?

Antipsychotics are drugs used to treat the symptoms of schizophrenia and other mental health problems in adults. The exact cause of these problems is not fully known. Antipsychotics work by changing chemicals in the brain that affect behavior, mood, and learning.

These drugs are also used to treat mental illnesses and other problems in children and adolescents (teens and pre-teens), such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, autism, and certain behavior disorders. The drugs that are used most often are called “atypical antipsychotics.”

What should I know before my child or adolescent takes an antipsychotic drug?

Antipsychotic drugs have not been well studied in children or adolescents. Most studies have included only adults. Only a few, very small studies have included children and adolescents. Even fewer studies have compared one drug with another.

As a result, we know little about how these drugs affect children’s and adolescents’ developing bodies. Only four drugs have been approved for use in children and adolescents. (See the top chart on the other side.)

Antipsychotic drugs can have serious side effects.

Most people who take antipsychotics have more than one side effect. The side effects are different for each drug.



There is not much information on how antipsychotics affect children and adolescents. Discuss other treatments with your child’s therapist or doctor. If they suggest a drug, ask about all the risks and benefits.

For children and adolescents, the most common side effects seem to be:

- Higher risk of Type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol
- Uncontrolled moving of the body, or a part of the body or face
- Weight gain

Antipsychotic drugs are expensive.

Only two of the drugs—clozapine and risperidone—are available as generics. Generics work the same as brand-name drugs, but they cost much less. The other drugs are available only as brand-name drugs. They can cost from \$200 to over \$1,000 a month.

Our advice:

Make sure there is a complete treatment plan for your child or adolescent before starting an antipsychotic drug. The plan should include cognitive behavioral therapy, parent-management training, and specialized educational programs. These treatments can help with many disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, autism, or a behavior disorder. Ask your child’s doctor about these treatments.

If you think your child or adolescent may need a drug, be sure to ask your doctor these questions:

- Will an antipsychotic drug treat my child’s symptoms?
- Will it be safe for my child?
- Are there other kinds of drugs to treat the symptoms?

You and the doctor should also talk about any other conditions your child or adolescent may have, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and how they are being treated.

If you and your doctor decide that your child or adolescent should try an antipsychotic drug, use the lowest possible dose. And make sure that the doctor sees your child regularly, to make sure the drug is helping.

Antipsychotic Drugs for Children and Adolescents

We do **not** recommend any of the drugs as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* because we do not know how safe and effective they are for children and adolescents under the age of 18.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

The FDA-approved antipsychotic drugs for limited use with children and adolescents

The FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) is the federal agency that evaluates new drugs and approves them for use. When the FDA approves a drug, it also decides the main ways the drug can be used. The drugs listed below have been FDA-approved for use with children and adolescents for the conditions shown:

| Generic Name | Brand Name | Generic Available? | FDA Approved For: |
|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--|
| aripiprazole | Abilify | No | Adolescents with schizophrenia; adolescents and children with certain bipolar disorders and irritability with autism |
| olanzapine | Zyprexa | No | Adolescents with schizophrenia and certain bipolar disorders |
| quetiapine | Seroquel; Seroquel XR | No | Adolescents with schizophrenia; adolescents and children with certain bipolar disorders |
| risperidone | Risperdal | Yes | Adolescents with schizophrenia; adolescents and children with certain bipolar disorders and irritability with autism |

Antipsychotic drugs used off-label

The FDA has not approved the drugs listed below for use with children and adolescents. Off-label use is when a doctor prescribes a drug for an unapproved use. This is legal, but there may be less research to support it.

| Generic Name | Brand Name | Generic Available? |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| asenapine | Saphris | No |
| clozapine | Clozaril; Fazaclo | Yes |
| iloperidone | Fanapt | No |
| paliperidone | Invega | No |
| ziprasidone | Geodon | No |