

# The Natural Pharmacy Newsletter

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## *In The News*

### **Rise In Prescription Medications Among Children, Teens**

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According to a recent article published in the Wall Street Journal, the number of prescription medications used by kids and teens in the United States is on the rise. Over 25% of individuals in these age groups take medications regularly, according to Medco Health Solutions, Inc. Of these people, almost 7% are on two or more medications chronically. Why such a large number? Researchers believe that it may be due to an increased awareness of medication options by both doctors and parents. It may also be attributed to more unhealthy diets by kids along with a lack of exercise which leads to weight gain and subsequent diseases and conditions.

While there may be potential benefits to prescribing these medications to children, it certainly does not come without risks. One of the biggest concerns with a few of the classes of medications being prescribed is that there is limited research and data about the true affects in kids, especially long-term. Many of these medications have been studied extensively in adults, but children and teens process and respond differently to medications than adults. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently started rewarding incentives to drug manufacturers who

perform studies in children, but is this enough? A key doctor with the National Institutes of Health admits there are errors in dosing and safety of medications in children. Certainly more studies, including larger and longer studies, would need to be conducted to prove whether some medications are safe and effective in children and young adults. Parents need to monitor their children closely to look for signs of improvement in symptoms as well as look for any potential debilitating side effects, especially in younger children as they may not be able to communicate properly. The following examines a few diseases and classes of medications and offers viable natural product options for use.

#### **Asthma**

The mainstay of prescription medication treatment for children with asthma is a steroid product like Flovent® (fluticasone) or Pulmicort® (budesonide). These medications, however, are known for causing numerous side effects such as upper respiratory tract infections, and have even been shown to stunt growth in children. For those individuals who are looking for a natural and potentially safer way to help prevent and treat asthma, fish oil or caffeine are options. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fish oil and produce anti-inflammatory effects in the body, thus helping a person to breathe easier in the presence of asthma among

other beneficial effects. Side effects are minimal and include belching and heartburn. Freezing the capsules or taking them with food may decrease the incidence of these side effects.

Another viable option for asthma treatment is caffeine. Caffeine has a chemical structure similar to the prescription medication theophylline which is used for the treatment of asthma. These medications work by blocking specific enzymes in the body which helps to produce dilation of the bronchioles. Side effects of caffeine include rapid heart rate, insomnia, and increased urination.

### **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**

In 2009, over 24 million prescriptions were sold to help children suffering from attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). Many of these medication fall into the category of amphetamines, powerful stimulants that help a child focus by releasing chemicals in the brain. Even though many of these medications seem to be effective, the numerous side effects may prevent doctors or parents from using them. These medications may be habit-forming and can cause insomnia and appetite suppression.

Natural options for the treatment of ADHD include fish oil and zinc. Preliminary results of a study show that fish oil may improve cognitive function and behavior in children suffering from ADHD. Adding evening primrose oil to the fish oil may help even more. Again, fish oil is generally well tolerated with minimal side effects. Zinc is involved in many processes in the brain. Those children with ADHD seem to possess lower levels of zinc than those without the disease. It appears zinc is more effective when used in combination with stimulants rather than when used alone, but studies are still being conducted to help prove this. This may be an appropriate agent if a zinc deficiency is suspected. Behavior therapy may also be warranted in some children to help with symptoms. Deanol (known as DMAE) and phosphatidylserine (known as PTS) have

been shown to have inconclusive results in trials, but still may be a safe, alternative option.

### **Depression**

Depression is caused by an imbalance of three chemicals in the brain – serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine. It is found more commonly in women than men, and many times occurs in the presence of another debilitating disease, like heart disease. Antidepressants are one of the broadest classes of medications, encompassing many subclasses.

There are many natural products available that affect chemicals in the brain. Probably the most well-known natural antidepressant is St. John's wort, which works similar to prescription antidepressants. Most studies suggest that St. John's wort is as effective as low dose prescription antidepressants, however a few studies have not shown this. The major problem with the use of St. John's wort is drug interactions. If you decide to use this product, be sure to talk to your pharmacist or doctor to make sure it is compatible with your other medications. SAMe is synthesized in the body, but is also found in high-protein foods like meats. It works differently than the conventional antidepressants but is safe and somewhat effective alternative to prescription medications. While this seems like a good alternative, the major downfall of the product is the price, upwards of \$60 per month if taken the suggested dose.

Traditionally, 5-HTP has been used for depression, sleep disorders, anxiety as well as a multitude of other conditions. It works by being a precursor to the neurotransmitter serotonin, which ultimately affects sleep, appetite and pain sensation, and is also crucial in depression, anxiety and aggression. Studies have shown that 5-HTP may be just as effective as some conventional antidepressants. 5-HTP is generally well tolerated, but should not be taken with any other traditional antidepressants. Certain amino acids may also play a role in the treatment of depression symptoms.

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