

## **CHILDREN AND ANTIPILEPTIC DRUGS (AEDS)**

### **What is the goal of treatment with antiepileptic drugs?**

The goal of treatment is to find the lowest dose of medication that can control seizures without causing side effects. There is no way to predict ahead of time which drug will be the best for a given child. Doctors choose medicines very carefully based on the likelihood of it helping, the likelihood it may cause side effects, and the specific details of the individual child's medical history. Sometimes a few different medications must be tried before the best medicine or combination of medicines is determined.

### **Will antiepileptic drugs cause any harm to my child?**

Antiepileptic drugs are generally very safe. Most side effects do not injure the child's organs and are reversible simply by lowering the dose or stopping the medication. Some medications may have rare side effects that are more serious. For those particular medicines, doing periodic blood tests helps catch those problems early so they can be minimized.

### **Do antiepileptic drugs cause mental retardation?**

No. Some patients feel they think more slowly on seizure medicines, particularly when taking multiple medicines at high doses. Occasionally children's school performance is affected by antiepileptic drugs. Lowering the drug dose or stopping the medication resolves this problem. Antiepileptic drugs do not cause any permanent mental changes.

### **Do antiepileptic drugs affect behavior?**

Each child is unique. Antiepileptic drugs can often improve behavior and mood but can also cause irritability in some children. Changing medicines to match the individual child's issues can avoid this side effect.

### **What do I do if medications are causing a problem?**

Talk to the doctor who prescribed the medication.

### **What can I do to get my child to take their medication?**

Mixing liquid medicine or crushed pills into a food they like is the easiest way. Pudding, bananas, and yogurt often work well. Ask your doctor whether it is okay to crush the pills, because some medicines should not be crushed. In most situations, there is another form of the medicine that you can try, such as a liquid or "sprinkle" form, if your child won't take the form you have.

### **Is there any difference in liquid or pill forms of drugs?**

There is no difference in the ability of the medicine to control seizures or cause side effects.

### **What side effects can antiepileptic drugs cause in children??**

Each medicine has its own risk of side effects, so you should ask your doctor about them before starting a new medicine. The most common side effects are sleepiness and unsteadiness. These tend to occur at higher doses, or when a dose has recently been increased. Often these side effects resolve once the child's body gets used to the medicine.

**Is it best to give the AED's before, after or with food?**

The most important thing is to take medicines at about the same time every day so that they are generally taken the same way and that your child doesn't miss any doses. Some medications are affected somewhat by being taken with food, so ask your doctor if you have particular concerns.

**Is there any food that my child should not eat when on AEDs?**

A balanced, healthy diet including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables is recommended for most children. This is no different for children on AEDs.

**Can I give my child over the counter medicines if they take AEDs?**

Yes. It is usually fine to use common medicines like Tylenol, ibuprofen, cough medicines and allergy medicines. If you have questions about a specific medicine, ask your doctor.

**Will my child take antiepileptic drugs for their entire life?**

Some children outgrow their epilepsy and can stop taking AEDs, but some do not. While we can't often cure epilepsy, we can usually control seizures. Many children will need to take AEDs for their whole lives, but will otherwise lead totally normal lives.

**Will the medications affect his school work?**

The goal of treatment is to help children do their very best in all aspects of life. Some medicines can cause side effects that may affect school work. If you feel this is the case, talk with your child's doctor about whether the seizures, AEDs or some other issue are causing the problem so it can be addressed.

**Are any special precautions needed because a child is on AEDs?**

There are special precautions for children with seizures, but the medicines do not require any additional precautions. In general, children with seizures should not do activities where a moment of unawareness could cause injury to them or somebody else. This includes driving motorized vehicles, climbing high up, swimming without an adult who could rescue them, being near flames, or handling power tools or firearms. They should also never be in a bathtub unattended to prevent drowning.

**Will the antiepileptic drugs stop seizures in my child?**

The majority of children with epilepsy have their seizures controlled with medications. Sometimes it requires adjusting the dose or switching to different medicines or combinations of medicines to find the right balance that controls seizures without causing side effects.

**What do I do if my child misses a dose?**

Giving most AEDs up to a few hours late is okay. If it is already time for the next dose, it is generally best to simply give the next dose and continue on as usual without making up the missed dose. Each situation is different, so if this happens you should contact your child's doctor.

**What do I do if the medications don't work to stop seizures?**

Talk with your child's doctor. For children whose seizures can't be controlled by medicines, there are sometimes other options such as special diets, implantable devices, or surgery. Doctors consider these options very carefully based on the details of each individual child's situation.