

[IMAGE]

Are Your Children Being Unnecessarily Medicated?

These days, it seems many medical doctors' first course of action is to recommend or prescribe drugs for any patient complaint; disturbingly, this trend seems to hold true whether the patient is an adult or a child.

An eye-opening study published in the May issue of *Pediatrics* revealed that many pediatricians have recommended the use of medication for children who suffer from sleep disturbances. In fact, of the 671 U.S. pediatricians surveyed, 75 percent said they had advised parents to administer an over-the-counter (OTC) medication, and more than 50 percent had prescribed a sleep aid.

Surprisingly, antihistamines were common OTC medications recommended, while a commonly prescribed sleep aid was clonidine, which is used to treat behavioral problems. Neither of these medications was specifically designed to treat insomnia; in fact, little is known about their safety and effectiveness for treating sleep-related problems. Moreover, they were administered to children who had difficulty sleeping and/or awoke frequently during the night, which most would agree is a fairly natural occurrence - especially in children.

On the flip side, many of these doctors may be overlooking more serious health problems masked as insomnia, including depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, psychological problems, and other medical conditions. And according to the study, the practitioners themselves expressed "a range of concerns about sleep medication appropriateness, safety, tolerance and side-effects in children."

If your child suffers from sleep-related difficulties, ask your doctor about all the options before opting for a "quick fix" with medication. There are many reasons for insomnia (in children and adults); make sure your physician determines the reason behind your child's problem - and its severity - before deciding the best manner in which to treat it.

Reference:

Owens JA, Rosen CL, Mindell JA. Medication use in the treatment of pediatric insomnia: results of a survey of community-based pediatricians. *Pediatrics* (online version), May 2003: Volume 111, Number 5, p.e628.

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