

[IMAGE]

Unhappy about Antidepressants



Prescriptions for antidepressant medications tripled in the U.S. between 1988 and 1998. Antidepressants are used to treat a wide range of disorders in adults - and children, despite few studies that support their safe and effective use in younger individuals.

To determine trends in antidepressant use in children and adolescents from 1988-1994, the authors of this study in the journal *Pediatrics* reviewed the records of over 800,000 youths in three health organizations: a group health maintenance organization (HMO) in the northwestern U.S.; Midwestern Medicaid (MWM); and Mid-Atlantic Medicaid (MAM). In the 2- to 19-year-old children, antidepressant use was defined as a prescription claim for the drugs during the previous year.

Information gathered from all three organizations showed an increase in antidepressant treatment. Over the seven-year period, the HMO, MWM, and MAM saw increases in pediatric antidepressant prescriptions of 3.6 times, 2.9 times, and 4.6 times, respectively. Over half of the antidepressant prescriptions in this period were prescribed for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Use of antidepressants was highest in boys in the 10- to 14-year-old range and girls in the 15- to 19-year-old range.

Avoid any medication that hasn't been clearly proven to be safe and effective, and always talk to your doctor about the benefits and risks before filling a prescription.

Reference:

Zito JM, Safer DJ, dosReis S, et al. Rising prevalence of antidepressants among US youths. *Pediatrics* 2002;109(5), pp. 721-727.

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