Antipsychotic Meds Linked to Risk of Childhood Diabetes

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Children who take antipsychotic medications for conditions such as bipolar disorder and behavioral problems might be at a higher risk of developing diabetes, according to new research published in the journal JAMA Psychiatry and reported in the Wall Street Journal.

After examining the medical records of 43,000 children covered under Tennessee's Medicaid program, researchers found that children treated with antipsychotics were three times more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than kids prescribed antidepressants or anti-anxiety drugs to treat their symptoms.

Findings showed that antipsychotic drugs such as risperidone (a.k.a. Risperdal) and olanzapine (a.k.a. Zyprexa) increased children's diabetes risk by promoting weight gain and boosting their insulin resistance. Researchers also found that a child's increased diabetes risk seemed to appear within their first year of treatment and that it continued to rise long-term with a patient's continued use of antipsychotic meds.

"We need to be more cautious when starting an antipsychotic for a child or youth and think about other alternatives, perhaps trying those other alternatives first," said Wayne Ray, PhD, a professor of health policy at Vanderbilt University and an author of the study.

Researchers also found that children's diabetes risk was much higher than that of adults who used antipsychotics. Adult patients were twice as likely to develop the disease. To avoid potential risks to kids, scientists suggested that children be given the lowest dose of antipsychotic medications possible for the shortest period of time.

These findings are particularly alarming because of the tremendous growth of antipsychotic meds among children during the last decade. Today, U.S. doctors prescribe more than 4.8 million antipsychotic drugs for kids each year.

Click here for more information about how antipsychotic drugs treat schizophrenia, a severe and disabling mental disorder.

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