

The Facts about Mental Health Medications

We agree with the administration's goal to tackle chronic diseases in children. More should be done to address our nation's mental health challenges and help children get the care they need.

Nearly one in four **Americans**, including 21% of **children** ages 3-17, have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. However, less than half of **adults** living with mental illness receive any treatment, and 20% of adolescents reported having unmet mental health care needs.

Medications have transformed the treatment of mental health conditions. When prescribed and used appropriately, they can help children function better at school, build relationships and enjoy daily life. With diagnoses on the rise and growing attention on mental health medications, it's important to know the facts about these tools that health care providers can use to treat mental illness.

MYTH: Certain mental health medications used to treat depression and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are overprescribed, especially for kids.

FACT: Many people with mental health conditions go untreated. The notion that these medications are overprescribed is misleading and data does not support the claim.



- Only about **half** of children diagnosed with ADHD are on medication. For adults, it's closer to one-third.
- Over **40% of adolescents** who experienced a major depressive episode between 2022 and 2023 received no treatment at all over that same period.

MYTH: The side effects of mental health medications outweigh any potential benefits, especially for children.

FACT: All medications can have side effects, but those prescribed by health care providers to treat mental health conditions are FDA-approved, found to be safe and effective, and the benefits and risks are considered based on each patient's unique diagnosis and needs.

- With the right stimulant medication and dose, **about 80% of kids** with ADHD see symptom improvement.
- Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs, used to treat depression and OCD) have been available for many decades, are well-studied in children and are **most effective** when part of a comprehensive treatment plan.
- Benefits and risks should be discussed with a health care provider to make an informed choice about the best treatment option.



MYTH: SSRIs don't work.

FACT: SSRIs help increase serotonin, a brain chemical that affects mood, sleep, appetite and more. SSRIs are FDA-approved for the treatment of major depressive disorder, meaning they're found to be safe and effective for treating that condition.

- A **large analysis** of over 500 studies and 110,000 patients found SSRIs are effective for treating major depressive disorder.
- They're especially helpful when used as part of a comprehensive treatment plan, including behavioral therapy.
- SSRIs are not **habit-forming** and are known to cause relatively **fewer side effects** than other antidepressants.



MYTH: ADHD stimulants are just a "crutch."

FACT: ADHD is a real and often serious condition. Medications help many people, especially children, function better at school, home and in relationships.

- Stimulants are the most common and effective treatment for ADHD and are well-studied in children.
- **About 80% of kids with ADHD** see symptoms improve with the right stimulant medication and dose.
- **Behavioral therapy helps** too but usually isn't enough on its own to effectively manage symptoms for children.



Prescription medications are an important option for health care providers, patients and their caregivers to consider as part of a personalized, comprehensive treatment plan. It's critical for patients to feel free from stigma and have access to patient-centric care and treatments to manage their conditions effectively.