

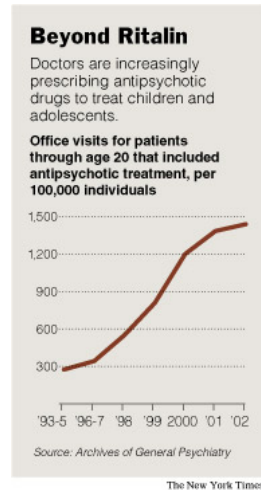


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## Use of Antipsychotics by the Young Rose Fivefold

By BENEDICT CAREY  
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The use of potent antipsychotic drugs to treat children and adolescents for problems like aggression and mood swings increased more than fivefold from 1993 to 2002, researchers reported yesterday.



The researchers, who analyzed data from a national survey of doctors' office visits, found that antipsychotic medications were prescribed to 1,438 per 100,000 children and adolescents in 2002, up from 275 per 100,000 in the two-year period from 1993 to 1995.

The findings augment earlier studies that have documented a sharp rise over the last decade in the prescription of psychiatric drugs for children, including antipsychotics, stimulants like Ritalin and antidepressants, whose sales have slipped only recently. But the new study is the most comprehensive to examine the increase in prescriptions for antipsychotics.

The explosion in the use of drugs, some experts said, can be traced in part to the growing number of children and adolescents whose problems are given psychiatric labels once reserved for adults and to doctors' increasing comfort with a newer generation of drugs for psychosis.

Shrinking access to long-term psychotherapy and hospital care may also play a role, the experts said.

The findings, published yesterday in Archives of General Psychiatry, are likely to inflame a continuing debate about the risks of using psychiatric medication in children. In recent years, antidepressants have been linked to an increase in suicidal thinking or behavior in some minors, and reports have suggested that stimulant drugs like Ritalin may exacerbate underlying heart problems.

Antipsychotic drugs also carry risks: Researchers have found that many of the drugs can cause rapid weight gain and blood lipid changes that increase the risk of [diabetes](#). None of the most commonly prescribed antipsychotics is approved for use in children, although doctors can prescribe any medication that has been approved for use.

Experts said that little was known about the use of antipsychotics in minors: only a handful of small studies have been done in children and adolescents.

"We are using these medications and don't know how they work, if they work, or at what cost," said Dr. John March, a professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at [Duke University](#). "It amounts to a huge experiment with the lives of American kids, and what it tells us is that we've got to do something other than we're doing now" to assess the drugs' overall impact.

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