Chill Pill?

Experts debate the effectiveness of ADHD meds.

November 29, 2007 By John Head

There's growing controversy around the use of Ritalin and other stimulants to treat children with hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder. The black community, in particular, is concerned about stereotypical views of African-American boys as "out of control," leading to unnecessary requests to medicate them. Still, medication supporters say the best treatment includes behavior modification and close monitoring of children for adverse side effects, and even some critics concede that the medications can be a last resort for children with severe attention and behavior problems. Real Health talked to two experts to get their views.

They'e Been Proven Effective:
"The medications work. They can play a significant role in helping kids focus their attention and control their behavior. This helps them do better academically and socially, which increases their self-esteem." *—Eugene V. Beresin, MD, professor of psychiatry at the Harvard School of Medicine and director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Training at McLean Hospital*

There Are Safer Options:
"These medications work by suppressing activities in the brain. That means some of the children's creative talents and capabilities may be diminished. Other steps, such as taking white sugar and other processed foods out of a child's diet, should be tried first." *—Eve Allen, doctor of alternative healing practices and director of the Circle of Health Wellness Center in Los Angeles*

FYI: According to a George Washington University study, long-term misuse or abuse of Ritalin can result in insomnia, malnutrition, and damage to the brain, heart and lungs.

Can a school require you to medicate your child? The answer, experts say, is an emphatic no. A diagnosis of ADHD or other learning disabilities requires schools to take steps to accommodate a child in the classroom. For advice, contact advocacy groups such as the National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Disabilities (aacld.org) or the Learning Disabilities Association of America (ldaamerica.org or call 888.300.6710).

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