

## Increased Psychotropic Medication Use Causes Concern

The May 2001 issue of the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine featured a study that showed a consistent increase of psychotropic medication usage in children and adolescents. This study showed that prescription prevalence in school-aged children 6 to 14 years increased from 4.4% to 9.5% of the population for stimulants during the study period.

These alarming numbers lead to an editorial by Mark L. Wolraich, MD, also published in the same issue. Dr. Wolraich, of the Child Development Center Vanderbilt University Medical Center South, opened his remarks by saying, "Are We Improving Mental Health Care or Drugging Our Kids?" Numerous articles over recent years have shown a dramatic increase in psychotropic drug usage in children.



Ritalin is probably the most widely used psychotropic drug for children. Many health care professionals are recommending that other means be used instead of drugs like Ritalin. Several studies have shown that this drug is quite dangerous and can cause the following effects.

- Decreased blood flow to the brain, an effect recently shown to be caused by cocaine where it is associated with impaired thinking ability and memory loss.
- Disruption of growth hormone, leading to suppression of growth in the body and brain of the child.
- Permanent neurological tics, including Tourette's Syndrome.
- Addiction and abuse, including withdrawal reactions on a daily basis.
- Psychosis (mania), depression, insomnia, agitation, and social withdrawal.
- Possible shrinkage (atrophy) or other permanent physical abnormalities in the brain.
- Worsening of the very symptoms the drug is supposed to improve, including hyperactivity and inattention.
- Decreased ability to learn.