

Medication Information for Parents and Teachers

Cyproheptadine

General Information About Medication

Each child and adolescent is different. No one has exactly the same combination of medical and psychological problems. It is a good idea to talk with the doctor or nurse about the reasons a medicine is being used. It is very important to keep all appointments and to be in touch by telephone if you have concerns. It is important to communicate with the doctor, nurse, or therapist. An *advanced practice nurse* (APN) has additional education and training after becoming a registered nurse (RN). Your child's medication may be prescribed by a medical doctor (MD or DO) or an APN. In addition, a *physician assistant* (PA) working with a physician may prescribe certain medications. In this information sheet, "doctor" includes medical doctors as well as APNs and PAs who prescribe medication. Often a nurse (RN) will be part of the team and answer questions and give information.

It is very important that the medicine be taken exactly as the doctor instructs. However, once in a while, everyone forgets to give a medicine on time. It is a good idea to ask the doctor or nurse what to do if this happens. Do not stop or change a medicine without asking the doctor or nurse first.

If the medicine seems to stop working, it may be because it is not being taken regularly. The youth may be "cheeking" or hiding the medicine or forgetting to take it (especially at school). The doses may be too far apart or a different dose or medicine may be needed. Something at school, at home, or in the neighborhood may be upsetting the youth, or he or she may need special help for learning disabilities or tutoring. Please discuss your concerns with the doctor. **Do not just increase the dose.** It is also very important not to decrease the dose or stop the medicine without talking to the doctor first. The problem being treated may come back, or there could be uncomfortable or even dangerous results.

All medicines should be kept in a safe place, out of the reach of children, and should be supervised by an adult. If someone takes too much of a medicine, call the doctor, the poison control center, or a hospital emergency room.

Each medicine has a "generic" or chemical name. Just like laundry detergents or paper towels, some medicines are sold by more than one company under different brand names. The same medicine may be available under a generic name and several brand names. The generic medications are usually less expensive than the brand name ones. The generic medications have the same chemical formula, but they may or may not be exactly the same strength as the brand-name medications. Also, some brands of pills contain dye or other things that can cause allergic reactions. It is a good idea to talk to the doctor and the pharmacist about whether it is important to use a specific brand of medicine.

Any medicine can cause an allergic reaction. Examples are hives, itching, rashes, swelling, and trouble breathing. Even a tiny amount of a medicine can cause a reaction in patients who are allergic to that medicine. Be *sure* to talk to the doctor before restarting a medicine that has caused an allergic reaction and tell the doctor about any reactions to medicine that your child has had before.

Taking more than one medicine at the same time may cause more side effects or cause one of the medicines to not work as well. Always ask the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before adding another

medicine, either prescription or bought without a prescription in a store or on the Internet. Be sure that each doctor knows about *all* of the medicines your child is taking. Also tell the doctor about any vitamins, herbal medicines, or supplements your child may be taking. Some of these may have side effects alone or when taken with this medication. It is a very good idea to keep a list with you of the names and doses of all medicines that your child is taking.

Everyone taking medicine should have a physical examination at least once a year.

If you think that your child may be using drugs or alcohol, please tell the doctor right away.

Pregnancy requires special care in the use of medicine. Some medicines can cause birth defects if taken by a pregnant mother. **Please tell the doctor immediately if you suspect the teenager is at risk of becoming pregnant.** The doctor may wish to discuss sexual behavior and/or birth control with your daughter.

Printed information like this applies to children and adolescents in general. If you have questions about the medicine, or if you notice changes or anything unusual, please ask the doctor or nurse. As scientific research advances, knowledge increases and advice changes. Even experts do not always agree. Many medicines have not been “approved” by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in children or use for particular problems. For this reason, use of the medicine for a problem or age group often is not listed in the *Physicians’ Desk Reference*. This does not necessarily mean that the medicine is dangerous or does not work, only that the company that makes the medicine has not received permission to advertise the medicine for use in children. Companies often do not apply for this permission because it is expensive to do the tests needed to apply for approval for use in children. Once a medication is approved by the FDA for any purpose, a doctor is allowed to prescribe it according to research and clinical experience.

Note to Teachers

It is a good idea to talk with the parent(s) about the reason(s) that a medication is being used. If the parent(s) sign consent to release information, it is often helpful for you to talk with the doctor. If the parent(s) give permission, the doctor may ask you to fill out rating forms about your experience with the student’s behavior, feelings, academic performance, and medication side effects. This information is very useful in selecting and monitoring medication treatment. If you have observations that you think are important, do not hesitate to share these with the student’s parent(s) and treating clinicians (with parental consent).

It is very important that the medicine be taken exactly as the doctor instructs. However, everyone forgets to give a medicine on time once in a while. It is a good idea to ask the parent(s) in advance what to do if this happens. Do not stop or change the time you are giving a medicine at school without parental permission. If a medication is to be taken with food, but lunchtime or snack time changes, be sure to notify the parent(s) so appropriate adjustments can be made.

All medicines should be kept in a secure place and should be supervised by an adult. If someone takes too much of a medicine, follow your school procedure for an urgent medical problem.

Taking medicine is a private matter and is best managed discreetly and confidentially. It is important to be sensitive to the student’s feelings about taking medicine.

If you suspect that the student is using drugs or alcohol, please tell the parent(s) or a school counselor right away.

Please tell the parent(s) or school nurse if you suspect medication side effects.

Modifications of the classroom environment or assignments may be useful in addition to medication. The student may need to be evaluated for additional help or a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan for learning problems or emotional or behavioral issues.

Any expression of suicidal thoughts or feelings or self-harm by a child or adolescent is a signal of distress and should be taken seriously. These behaviors should not be dismissed as “attention seeking.” School procedures for safety issues should be followed.

What Is Cyproheptadine?

Cyproheptadine is called an *antibistamine*. Antihistamines were developed to treat allergies. Cyproheptadine is sometimes used to treat anxiety (nervousness) or insomnia (difficulty falling asleep). It may be used to increase appetite in people who do not eat enough food and to prevent cluster and migraine headaches. Cyproheptadine comes in generic tablets and syrup.

How Can This Medicine Help?

Cyproheptadine may decrease nervousness. When used for anxiety, it works best when used for a short time along with psychotherapy. Cyproheptadine can help with insomnia when used for a short time along with a behavioral program, such as regular soothing routines at bedtime and increased exercise in the daytime. In people who are not eating enough and are too thin, it can increase appetite and help to gain weight.

How Does This Medicine Work?

Cyproheptadine can help decrease anxiety and help falling asleep because of its sedative effect—that is, it makes people a little sleepy so that they feel less nervous and fall asleep more easily. It works on the *serotonin* system as well as the *cholinergic* and *histamine* systems.

How Long Does This Medicine Last?

Cyproheptadine lasts for 4–7 hours.

How Will the Doctor Monitor This Medicine?

The doctor will review your child's medical history and physical examination before starting cyproheptadine. Be sure to tell the doctor if your child or anyone in the family has a history of asthma or of heart rhythm problems, palpitations, or fainting. The doctor or nurse may measure your child's height, weight, pulse, and blood pressure before starting the medicine.

After the medicine is started, the doctor will want to have regular appointments with you and your child to see how the medicine is working, to see if a dose change is needed, to watch for side effects, to see if cyproheptadine is still needed, and to see if any other treatment is needed. The doctor or nurse may check your child's height, weight, pulse, and blood pressure.

What Side Effects Can This Medicine Have?

Any medicine can have side effects, including an allergy to the medicine. Because each patient is different, the doctor will monitor the youth closely, especially when the medicine is started. The doctor will work with you

to increase the positive effects and decrease the negative effects of the medicine. Please tell the doctor if any of the listed side effects appear or if you think that the medicine is causing any other problems. Not all of the rare or unusual side effects are listed.

Side effects are most common after starting the medicine or after a dose increase. Many side effects can be avoided or lessened by starting with a very low dose and increasing it slowly—ask the doctor.

Allergic Reaction

Tell the doctor in a day or two (if possible, before the next dose of medicine):

- Hives
- Itching
- Rash

Stop the medicine and get *immediate* medical care:

- Trouble breathing or chest tightness
- Swelling of lips, tongue, or throat

Common Side Effects

Tell the doctor within a week or two:

- Daytime sleepiness—Do not allow your child to drive, ride a bicycle or motorcycle, or operate machinery if this happens.
- Decreased attention, memory, or learning in school
- Increased appetite and weight gain
- Dry mouth—Have your child try using sugar-free gum or candy.
- Headache
- Blurred vision
- Constipation—Encourage your child to drink more fluids and eat high-fiber foods; if necessary, the doctor may recommend a fiber medicine such as Benefiber or a stool softener such as Colace or mineral oil.
- Trouble passing urine
- Dizziness or light-headedness—This side effect is worse when the child stands up quickly, especially when getting out of bed in the morning; try having the child stand up slowly.
- Nausea or upset stomach

Less Common Side Effects

Call the doctor within a day or two:

- Poor coordination
- Motor tics (fast, repeated movements)
- Unusual muscle movements
- Irritability, increased overactivity
- Waking up after sleeping for a short time and being unable to get back to sleep

- Exposure to sunlight may cause severe sunburn, skin rash, redness, or itching; have the child stay out of the sun or use sunscreen or protective clothing.

Very Rare, but Serious, Side Effects

Call the doctor *immediately*:

- Worsening of asthma or trouble breathing
- Seizure (fit, convulsion)
- Uncontrollable behavior
- Hallucinations (seeing things that are not really there)
- Severe muscle stiffness
- Irregular heartbeat (pulse), fainting, palpitations

Some Interactions With Other Medicines or Food

Please note that the following are only the most likely interactions with other medicines or food.

If other medicines that can cause sleepiness are taken with cyproheptadine, severe sleepiness can result.

It can be *very dangerous* to take cyproheptadine at the same time as or even within a month of taking another type of medicine called a *monoamine oxidase inhibitor* (MAOI), such as selegiline (El-depryl), phenelzine (Nardil), tranylcypromine (Parnate), or isocarboxazid (Marplan).

What Could Happen if This Medicine Is Stopped Suddenly?

Stopping this medicine suddenly does not usually cause problems, but diarrhea or feeling sick may result if it has been taken for a long time. The problem being treated may come back. Always ask the doctor whether a medicine can be stopped suddenly or must be decreased slowly (tapered).

How Long Will This Medicine Be Needed?

When used for nervousness or sleep, cyproheptadine is usually prescribed for a very short time to allow the patient to be calm enough to learn new ways to cope. If the person needs treatment for a longer time, another medicine is usually prescribed.

What Else Should I Know About This Medicine?

The medicine should be given with milk or food.

People who take cyproheptadine must not drink alcohol. Severe sleepiness or even loss of consciousness may result.

