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People who access our services are welcome to talk to the team manager if they are experiencing any problems with their care.

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Low Dose Risperidone

Information for parents and carers

Helping people to be
the best they can be

Risperidone – what is it?

Risperidone was initially developed for the treatment of illnesses such as schizophrenia and mania. However, it is sometimes also effective, when used in low doses, for the treatment of challenging behaviour in children and young people with learning disabilities, autism and autistic spectrum disorders. It would only be used if non-drug measures, such as behavioural management, had been unsuccessful.

Side effects

Side effects are usually mild and short lived when a low dose of Risperidone (less than 3mg a day) is used.

The most common side effects are sedation and an increase in appetite and weight. In the long term significant increase in weight can lead to an increased risk of diabetes mellitus. It is very important to watch your child's diet and exercise.

Other side effects include: dizziness, drooling, tremor, constipation and headache.

Risperidone may cause increases in the level of the hormone prolactin. At low dose side effects from this are rare but could include breast tenderness and leakage and periods stopping. In the long term there may be a risk of infertility and osteoporosis. In boys the ability to achieve erection can be affected.

There are many other, less common, side effects and these are listed on the leaflet which comes with the medication. These do not normally occur in patients taking low dose Risperidone.

Investigations and monitoring

Before Risperidone is prescribed, your doctor will ask about your child's medical history, the family history, medication and allergies. Height, weight, blood pressure and pulse will be measured if appropriate.

Because Risperidone can affect blood chemistry we recommend a baseline blood test before starting the medication and twice yearly blood tests whilst your child continues to take the medication. This blood test will measure the level of prolactin as well as blood sugar, lipid levels and liver function. If getting your child to have a blood test is likely to be very difficult your doctor will discuss this further with you.

When your child is taking Risperidone the prescribing doctor will monitor their height and weight as well as ask you about any side effects.

Dosage

Your child will start taking a low dose of Risperidone (usually 0.5mg per day). This will be gradually increased depending on response. The usual maximum dose of Risperidone for these difficulties is 2-3mg per day. Risperidone is available in liquid preparation as well as tablets.

Stopping Risperidone

Please discuss this with your doctor as the dose may need to be gradually reduced.

A note on licensing

Risperidone is licensed for the short term (up to six weeks) treatment of conduct disorder in children under the age of 15 years. It is not licensed for the treatment of aggression in autism. However this is largely related to drug marketing issues and does not mean the drugs are more harmful in these children. A doctor can prescribe non-licensed drugs. There is a leaflet available about the use of drugs 'off-label'.

Are there any alternatives to Risperidone?

Behavioural and environmental treatments will always be considered before drugs and if the doctor is discussing Risperidone with you it is likely that these have been ineffective.

It is likely that other drugs similar to Risperidone might be effective for the same sorts of difficulties but most of the research so far has been done on Risperidone.

There may be reasons to do with side effects that your doctor will recommend a different medication to you.