CHILDREN AND ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS (AEDS)

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF TREATMENT WITH ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS (AEDS)?
The goal of epilepsy treatment with AEDs is to find the lowest dose of medication that can control seizures without causing side effects. There is no way to predict ahead of time which drug will be the best for a child. Doctors choose medications very carefully based on the likelihood of it helping, the likelihood that it may cause side effects, and the specific details of the individual child’s medical history. Sometimes a few different medications must be tried before the best medicine or combination of medicines is determined.

WILL ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS CAUSE ANY HARM TO MY CHILD?
AEDs are generally very safe. Most side effects do not injure the child’s organs and are reversible simply by lowering the dose or stopping the medication. Some AEDs may have rare side effects that are more serious. For those particular AEDs, periodic blood tests may be helpful to identify problems as soon as possible.

DO ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS CAUSE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY?
Some children feel like they think more slowly on antiepileptic drugs, particularly when taking multiple AEDs at high doses. Occasionally, a child’s school performance is affected by AEDs. Sometimes, lowering the AED dose or stopping the medication may resolve this problem. However, you must have a conversation with the doctor prescribing the AEDs before doing this.

DO ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS AFFECT BEHAVIOR?
Each child is unique. AEDs may improve behavior and mood in some children, but may also cause irritability in other children. Changing AEDs to match the individual child’s issues can avoid this side effect.

WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK MY CHILD’S AEDS ARE CAUSING A PROBLEM?
Talk to the doctor who prescribes your child’s AEDs.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET MY CHILD TO TAKE THEIR MEDICATION?
Mixing liquid medicine or crushed pills into a food they like is the easiest way. Pudding, bananas, and yogurt often work well. However, some medications should not be crushed, so please ask your doctor first if it is okay to crush the medication. If your child will not take the form of medication that you have (i.e. liquid or “sprinkles”), talk to the doctor who prescribes the medication about the possibility of switching the form.
IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE IN LIQUID OR PILL FORMS OF DRUGS?
There is no difference in the ability of the medicine to control seizures or cause side effects.

WHAT SIDE EFFECTS CAN ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS CAUSE IN CHILDREN?
Each AED has its own risk of side effects, so you should talk to your doctor about side effects of every new medication your child starts. The most common side effects are sleepiness and unsteadiness. These tend to occur at higher doses, or when a dose has recently been increased. Often these side effects resolve once the child’s body gets used to the medicine.

IS IT BEST TO GIVE THE AEDS BEFORE, AFTER OR WITH FOOD?
The most important thing is to have your child take his/her medications at about the same time every day so that they are generally taken the same way and that your child doesn’t miss any doses. Some medications are affected somewhat by being taken with food, so ask your doctor if you have particular concerns.

IS THERE ANY FOOD THAT MY CHILD SHOULD NOT EAT WHEN ON AEDS?
A balanced, healthy diet including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables is recommended for most children. This recommendation is no different for children on AEDs.

CAN I GIVE MY CHILD OVER THE COUNTER MEDICATIONS IF THEY TAKE AEDS?
Yes. It is usually fine to use common medicines like Tylenol, ibuprofen, cough medicines and allergy medicines. If you have questions about a specific medication, ask your doctor.

WILL MY CHILD TAKE ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS FOR THEIR ENTIRE LIFE?
Some children outgrow their epilepsy and can stop taking AEDs, but some do not. Many children will need to take AEDs for their whole lives, but will otherwise lead totally normal lives.

ARE ANY SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS NEEDED BECAUSE A CHILD IS ON AEDS?
There are special precautions for children with seizures, but AEDs typically do not require any additional precautions.

WILL THE ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS STOP SEIZURES IN MY CHILD?
The majority of children with epilepsy have their seizures controlled with medications. Sometimes it requires adjusting the dose or switching to different medicines or
combinations of medicines to find the right balance that controls seizures without causing side effects.

**WHAT DO I DO IF MY CHILD MISSES A DOSE?**
- If you realize that a dose of medication was missed – do not double the next dose. If there are more than two hours until the next dose is due, give the late dose as soon as you realize the dose was missed. If there are less than two hours until the next dose, skip the late dose.

**WHAT DO I DO IF THE AEDS DON'T STOP MY CHILD’S SEIZURES?**
Talk with your child’s doctor. For children whose seizures can’t be controlled by medicines, there are sometimes other options such as special diets, implantable devices, or surgery. Doctors consider these options very carefully based on the details of each individual child’s situation.