

Polypharmacy Concerns in People with IDD

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often take a number of medications. Sometimes they are necessary, but careful consideration should always be given to reducing the number of medications or the dosage a person is taking to the lowest effective dose.

When adding a new medication or increasing the dosage, monitor the person closely for the next few weeks.

People with IDD sometimes have limited ability to communicate with words and therefore may communicate through various behaviors. They may communicate the symptoms of medication side effects and drug interactions by not eating (because of nausea or constipation), verbal or physical aggression, not participating in once enjoyable activities, and even talking and interacting less with others due to sedation or just plain feeling bad.

Whenever a person's behavior changes, it is important to evaluate the medications a person is taking to see if something new has been added or a dose has been changed that can be the cause.

When adding a new medication or increasing the dosage, monitor the person closely for the next few weeks to look for negative effects, which might require discontinuation of the medication. Also monitor for the expected improvement from the medication to evaluate efficacy.

If the medication is not achieving its goal, consider stopping the medication before adding another one. This is especially important when using psychotropic medications, as it is not uncommon to see people on several different psychotropics in the same drug class, which can lead to additive side effects and complications. It is important that people who support those with IDD understand the possible side effects that may occur with medications a person is taking. They should know what to look out for that may indicate that a potential side effect is occurring, and who to notify should they suspect one.

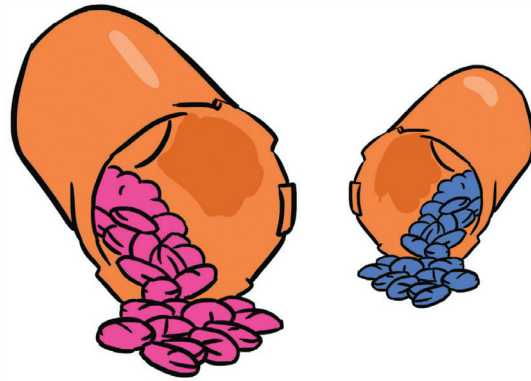


Routinely review all medications a person is taking, even if they are stable on them, to see if they are still necessary. Sometimes someone is placed on a medication, and it's continued indefinitely without a good reason. Iron is a good example. If there is no improvement in 120 days, an anemia workup should be done.

Careful and regular review of the medications a person is taking for efficacy and side effects is warranted to minimize complications of medications.

Thanks for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.

This IntellectAbility Resource Sheet is sourced from [Clinical Pearls in IDD Healthcare: Second Edition](#), written by Craig Escudé, MD, FAAFP, FAAIDD, FAADM.



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Practical Clinical Guidance for IDD Healthcare

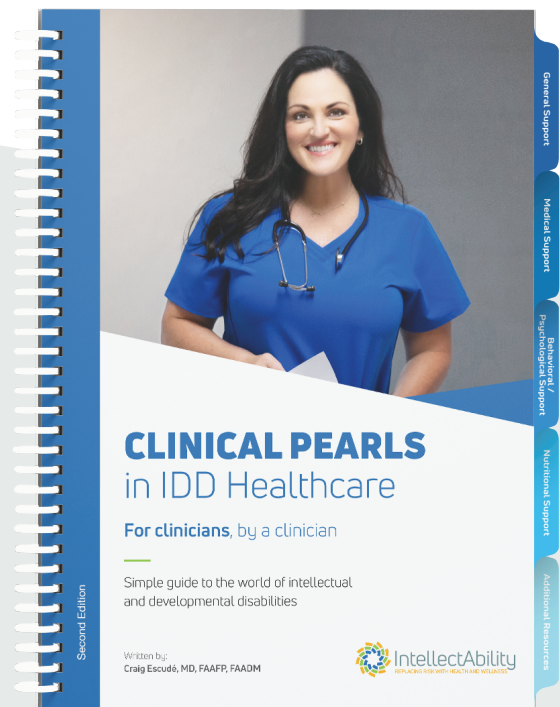
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