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OCD and Streptococcal Infections Linked

As reported in an article in the Psychiatric Times (December 1997), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) among children is "remarkably common." According to author Arline Kaplan, the prevalence is one in 100. Focusing on new pharmacological treatment options for children and adolescents, the article further reported that "the new drug approval study conducted by Solvay Pharmaceuticals demonstrated that Luvox (fluvoxamine) was 'statistically better than placebo for children with OCD.' This was demonstrated by the participant's scores on the Children's Yale-Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale and National Institute of Mental Health's Global Obsessive-Compulsive Scale. Of particular interest to parents are the findings of the reports that showed that adverse events among children were about equivalent for two groups; only four patients dropped the study, one on placebo and three on fluvoxamine. What is perhaps even more encouraging is the work of Susan Swedo, M.D., and Judith Rapoport, M.D., and their colleagues at NIMH who have in their research demonstrated a link between autoimmunity and OCD. According to the Psychiatric Times article, "There is an increasing body of data that suggests there may be a relationship between certain forms of childhood-onset OCD and previous Group A beta-hemolytic streptococcal infections. There seem to be a group of children that have early-onset OCD, tic disorder, Sydenham's chorea and family history of tics." Sydenham's chorea is a major manifestation of rheumatic fever and a disorder generally limited to prepubertal children. It is thought to be a disease of basal ganglia, and the basal ganglia is thought to be involved in both Sydenham's chorea and OCD. Children with Sydenham's chorea frequently present with OCD symptoms. Drs. Swedo and Rapoport and colleagues at NIMH published research in 1989 that suggested that obsessive-compulsive symptoms occurred in more than 70 percent of children affected by Sydenham's chorea. Further, these symptoms, such as contamination fears, fear of harm coming to a loved one, and excessive washing and checking, were indistinguishable from those of classic OCD. Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder often associated (comorbid) with OCD, has an incidence of between .03 percent and .04 percent in general populations. However, the incidence of tics is between 4 percent and 12 percent in school-age children. The incidence of Tourette's syndrome in childhood-onset OCD is 15 percent, while 40 percent to 60 percent of children with Tourette's syndrome have obsessive-compulsive symptoms. The incidence of tics in childhood-onset OCD is reportedly as high as 59 percent, according to Ms. Kaplan.

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