

Keeping it Current

Raising Healthy Teens



Prescription Drug Abuse

The nonmedical use and abuse of prescription drugs is a serious public health problem in this country. Prescription drug abuse occurs when someone takes a medication that was prescribed for someone else or takes their own prescription in a manner or dosage other than what was prescribed. Abuse can include taking a friend's or relative's prescription to get high, to help with studying, or even to treat pain.

Prescription drugs such as pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants and sedatives, are the second most commonly abused category of drugs, behind marijuana and ahead of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines.

The most often used prescription drugs and most commonly abused drugs fall into three classes:

- Opioids (such as OxyContin, Demeral and Vicodin)
- Central nervous system depressants (such as Xanax, Luminal, and Valium)
- Stimulants (such as Concerta, Ritalin and Adderall)

The National Institute of Health estimates that nearly 20 percent of our population have used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons.

Did You Know?

National studies indicate that the intentional abuse of prescription drugs by teens is a growing concern. According to some reports, each day an average of 2,000 teenagers use a prescription drug without a doctor's guidance for the first time.

The Facts

There may be a perception, especially among younger people, that prescription drugs are safer than illegal street drugs. Most people don't lock up their prescription medications, nor do they discard them when they are no longer needed for their intended use, making them vulnerable to theft or misuse. Because these drugs become so readily available, and many believe they are safe way to get high, some teens that wouldn't otherwise touch illicit drugs might abuse prescription drugs.

The Risks

Like all drug abuse, using prescription drugs for the wrong reasons has serious risks for a person's health.

- Opioid abuse can lead to mood and behavior changes, trouble thinking clearly, breathing problems, and even a coma or death. This risk is higher when opioids are taken with other substances like alcohol, antihistamines, and CNS depressants.
- CNS depressant abuse is risky too. Depressants can make people sleepy, uncoordinated, or confused, and can lead to slurred speech and slowed breathing. Abruptly stopping or reducing them too quickly can lead to seizures. Taking CNS depressants with other

medicines, such as prescription painkillers, some over-the-counter cold and allergy medicines, or alcohol can slow a person's heartbeat and breathing — and even kill.

- Stimulant abuse (like with some ADHD drugs) may cause heart problems, seizures, panic attacks, paranoia, and violent behavior. These risks increase when stimulants are mixed with other medicines — even ones you can buy without a prescription, like cold medicines.

Probably the most common risk of prescription drug abuse is [addiction](#). People who abuse medicines can become addicted as easily as if they were taking street drugs. That's one reason most doctors won't renew a prescription unless they see the patient — they want to examine patients to make sure they're not getting addicted.

Signs of Use

Signs of abuse can depend on the drug involved. Someone who abuses opioids might have:

- Dizziness
- Slow or shallow breathing
- Upset stomach, vomiting, or constipation
- Slurred speech
- Poor coordination
- Mood swings
- Depression or anxiety

Abuse of CNS depressants can cause:

- Mood changes
- Trouble walking
- Trouble concentrating
- Poor judgment
- Slow reflexes
- Slurred speech
- Memory problems
- Slow breathing

Symptoms of stimulant abuse include:

- Weight loss and lack of appetite
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Nervousness
- High blood pressure
- Uneven heart rate
- Paranoia

Treatment

Years of research have shown that substance use disorders are brain disorders that can be treated effectively. Treatment must take into account the type of drug used and the needs of the individual. Successful treatment may need to incorporate several components, including detoxification, counseling, and medications, when available. Multiple courses of treatment may be needed for the patient to make a full recovery. **For more information:**

<https://nida.nih.gov/drugs-abuse/prescription-drugs-cold-medicines>

VISIT US ONLINE: **AHC-STL.org**

<https://www.montgomerycountypa.gov/161/Teen-Prescription-Drug-Abuse>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/prescription-drug-abuse.html>

<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/how-can-prescription-drug-addiction-be-treated>