

Rx



What is prescription drug abuse?

Prescription drug abuse occurs when someone uses a prescription drug that was not prescribed to them and/or when prescription medicine is used in a way not intended by the prescriber/doctor.

Why do/would youth abuse prescription medications?

Sometimes youth abuse prescription drugs with the belief it helps them be more successful in their daily lives such as:

- They believe it helps with school performance (classwork and tests)
- They believe it helps with athletic performance
- They believe it helps with peer/social situations

Of course, youth also abuse prescription drugs for the sole purpose of “getting high”/altering the state of their mind.

Which prescription drugs are most often abused?

The most often abused prescription drugs generally are found in three different drug classes:

- **Opioids:** Such as Fentanyl, oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and meperidine (Demerol), prescribed for pain management.

- **Central Nervous System (CNS) Depressants:** Such as phenobarbital (Luminal), diazepam (Valium), and alprazolam (Xanax), prescribed for seizures, anxiety, panic attacks, and sleep disorders.
- **Stimulants:** Such as methylphenidate (Ritalin) and amphetamine/dextroamphetamine (Adderall), often prescribed for ADHD

Are prescription drugs really that bad?

According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, prescription drug abuse by American teens is a serious problem. About 1 in 4 teens have misused/abused prescription drugs at one time or another.

What many parents fail to recognize is that prescription drugs can affect the brain and body the same way illicit/illegal drugs affect the brain and body. And just like alcohol or illegal drugs, prescription drugs can lead to dependence and addiction.

Here are some of the more concerning affects for the three different drug classes of prescription drugs that are most often abused:

Opioid Abuse can lead to mood and behavior changes, trouble thinking clearly, poor decision-making, shallow/slowed breathing, and/or even a coma or death. All of these possible affects, especially the risk of coma and/or death, substantially increase when opioids are taken with other substances like alcohol, antihistamines, and CNS depressants.

CNS Depressant Abuse can cause drowsiness/sleepiness, loss of coordination, confusion, slurred speech and/or slowed and shallow breathing. Furthermore, abruptly stopping or reducing these drugs too quickly can lead to seizures. Furthermore, taking CNS depressants with other prescription pain medication (opioids), some over-the-counter cold and allergy medicines, and/or alcohol can slow a person's heart rate and breathing, which can lead to brain damage and/or death.

Stimulant Abuse (like with some ADHD drugs) may cause heart problems due to an increased heart rate, seizures, panic attacks, paranoia, and violent behavior. Like the other prescription drugs listed, these risks increase when stimulants are mixed with other prescription and illicit drugs as well as over the counter (OTC) medications like cold and allergy medications.

What are some signs and symptoms of prescription drug abuse?

Opioids:

- Constipation
- Nausea
- Feeling high
- Slowed breathing rate
- Drowsiness

- Confusion
- Poor coordination
- Increased dose needed for pain relief

CNS Depressant:

- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Unsteady walking
- Slurred speech
- Poor concentration
- Dizziness
- Problems with memory
- Slowed breathing

Stimulants:

- Increased alertness
- Feeling high
- Irregular heartbeat
- High blood pressure
- High body temperature
- Reduced appetite
- Insomnia
- Agitation
- Anxiety
- Paranoia

Some other possible signs:

- Forging, stealing or selling prescriptions
- Taking higher doses than prescribed
- Being hostile or having mood swings
- Sleeping less or more
- Making poor decisions
- Being unusually energetic, high or revved up
- Being drowsy
- Requesting early refills or continually "losing" prescriptions, so more prescriptions must be written
- Trying to get prescriptions from more than one prescriber

What can parents do to address prescription drug abuse?

- Be a role model- don't misuse prescription drugs yourself.

- Have open conversations-Talk with your kids about healthy ways to handle life expectations and experiences and help them come up with some healthy, safe ways to cope.
- Discuss the dangers of mixing prescription drugs with other substances (pharming). Combining prescription drugs and OTC medications with other illicit drugs or alcohol, greatly increases the possibility of an overdose.
- Consider keeping naloxone (Narcan) on hand. Naloxone is a prescribed medicine that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. If you suspect your child or their friends are abusing opioids, talk to your healthcare provider about having naloxone on hand.
 - For more information about and where to get naloxone, click the link below:
<https://stopodne.com/>
- Keep your prescription medications in a secure place. Ideally, locking medications up is often the most effective way to keep them out of the hands of youth. Even if you can't lock them up, keeping them in a secure place (not in the bathroom or kitchen cabinet) can also be very effective.
- Dispose of any unused prescription drugs. Ask your pharmacist about safe medicine disposal options in your area.

<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/family/how-teens-misuse-medicine>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4827331/>

https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/resource-center/Publications/DEA_Prescription-For-Disaster_508ver.pdf

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