

Fact Sheet – Prescription and OTC Drug Abuse

The number of teens and young adults abusing over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medications grows daily in the United States. The impact is dangerous – this kind of drug use can lead to addiction, chronic health issues, hospitalization, and overdose. Next to marijuana use, prescription and OTC drug use is the most commonly abused substance by teens 14 years and older.

According to GetSmartAboutDrugs.gov, the prescription drugs most abused by teens fall under three categories:

- Opioids: painkillers such as Vicodin™, OxyContin™, or codeine
- Depressants: such as like Valium™ or Xanax™ (also known as Benzodiazepines); used to reduce anxiety or as sleep aids
- Stimulants: such as Adderall™ or Ritalin™ used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

One of the problems is that teens don't believe these drugs are dangerous – because they are legitimately prescribed by doctors and made in a laboratory, they don't think of them as addictive or harmful the way they think of illegal drugs bought on the street or online. OTC and prescription drugs are readily available, often found in their home medicine cabinets or in the pockets of their friends. Teens don't need to find a connection like they would for heroin, cocaine or marijuana.

What Adults Can Do

Education and communication are key to helping children avoid experimentation and possible addiction to any kind of drugs. Experts recommend telling children the following information about prescription drugs:

- Prescription drugs taken without a doctor's prescription or against a doctor's orders or supervision are often just as dangerous as taking illegal drugs or drinking alcohol. All of these drugs can become addictive.
- Painkillers contain the same basic ingredients as heroin: opiates. They can adversely affect the respiratory system and cause serious, chronic depression.
- Depression medications can cause seizures, respiratory depression, and seriously decreased heart rate.
- Stimulants cause body temperature to rise, irregular heartbeat, cardiovascular system failure, seizures (often fatal), and hostility or paranoia.
- Doctors prescribe specific medications for specific illnesses — medications that can have beneficial results for the intended diagnosis. However, prescription medications can have a very different (and harmful) impact on people who are healthy.
- Doses of medications are designed for a specific person based on age, weight, degree of illness, and other variables. The effects of taking an inappropriate dosage can range from mild to deadly, and can cause dangerous interactions if other drugs or chemicals are present in the body.
- The dangers from abusing prescription medications increase when other drugs chemicals, are alcohol are used -- and can often be lethal.

RESOURCES

Consumer Healthcare Products Association www.chpa-info.org

D.A.R.E. www.dare.com

Drug Enforcement Administration, National Drug Threat Assessment www.dea.gov

Kids Health www.kidshealth.org

The National Institute of Drug Abuse www.nida.nih.gov

OTC (Over the Counter) Safety www.otcsafety.org

The Partnership for a Drug-free America™ www.drugfree.org

Get Smart About Drugs www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/content/prescription-drug-abuse