

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE: A Growing Problem Among Teens

The abuse of prescription drugs is on the rise among high school students. They think these drugs are safe because they have legitimate uses. But taking these drugs without being under a doctor's care to get high can be as dangerous (and addictive) as using illegal street drugs! And when you mix prescription drugs with other drugs of abuse, such as marijuana & alcohol, you are putting yourself at greater risk for drug interactions and overdose.

Many pills look similar, but depending on the type of drug & the dosage, the effects can vary greatly from mild to deadly! Three types of prescription medications are commonly abused – pain relievers, stimulants & sedatives/depressants. Over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines (especially those with dextromethorphan) are also abused.

Pain Relievers (opioids/narcotics)

Examples: Oxy-Contin, Percocet, Percodan, Vicodin

- short-term effects: dizziness; lightheadedness; feeling faint; inability to urinate; itching; nausea; vomiting; breathing could stop (if dose too large/potent); you can die the very first time you abuse/misuse a prescription pain killer
- long-term effects: severe constipation; severe weight loss or malnutrition; disrupted menstrual cycles (girls); decreased testosterone levels (boys)

Stimulants

Examples: Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine

- short-term effects: dangerously high body temperatures; loss of appetite; inability to sleep; feelings of hostility, distorted thinking & paranoia; irregular heart beat & heart failure; increased heart rate & blood pressure; hallucinations; seizures; death
- long-term effects: severe weight loss or malnutrition; mental illness; periods of restlessness, delirium & panic; insomnia; exhaustion & mental confusion; feelings of hostility, distorted thinking & paranoia; heart problems; tolerance to the drug (need more for same effect); addiction

Sedatives/Depressants

Examples: Valium, Xanax

- short-term effects: drowsiness; loss of coordination; decreased inhibition; slurred speech, difficulty concentrating & making good judgments; large doses can cause a person to stop breathing leading to death
- long-term effects: decreased ability to think clearly; decreased coordination; reduced reflexes; difficulties with memory; depression; possible addiction; if physically dependent & you try to stop too quickly there can be seizure & death

Over-the-counter Cough & Cold Meds

Examples: syrups, lozenges, gel caps, tablets, capsules

*in large quantities can cause hallucinations; loss of motor control & “out-of-body” sensations; loss of consciousness; seizures; brain damage & even death

*can also cause fever; excessive sweating; nausea/vomiting; irregular heart beat; high blood pressure