

Prescription drugs

PAIN RELIEVERS: OXYCONTIN, PERCOCET, PERCODAN, VICODIN, CODEINE, DARVON, DILAUDID, DEMEROL. DEPRESSANTS: BARBITURATES, NEMUBUTAL, VALIUM, XANAX, HALCION. STIMULANTS: RITALIN, ADDERALL, DEXEDRINE.

Prescription pain relievers and other medications can help people live more productive lives. But that's when they are prescribed for a particular individual to treat a specific condition. Taking prescription drugs in a way that hasn't been recommended by a doctor can be more dangerous than you think. In fact, it's drug abuse. And it's as illegal as taking street drugs.

You might think that prescription drugs are safer and less addictive than street drugs. But they are only safe for those who actually have prescriptions for them. Abuse of prescription drugs now ranks second—only behind marijuana—as the nation's most prevalent illegal drug problem.

WHICH DRUGS ARE ABUSED?

Taking prescription drugs to get high is drug abuse and is dangerous. This includes pain relievers, such as those drugs prescribed after surgery; depressants, such as sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs; and stimulants, such as those drugs prescribed for ADHD.

SIDE EFFECTS

The likelihood that you will commit a crime, be a victim of a crime, or have an accident is higher when you are abusing drugs—no matter whether those drugs are prescription medications or street drugs.

PAIN RELIEVERS Just a single dose of a pain reliever can lower your breathing rate and even kill you when it's taken in the wrong circumstances. This risk is higher when pain relievers are taken with other substances like alcohol, antihistamines and depressants.

DEPRESSANTS have risks, too. Reducing or stopping them can lead to seizures. Taking depressants with other medications such as prescription pain relievers, some over-the-counter (OTC) cold and allergy medications or alcohol can slow your heartbeat and breathing—and even be deadly.

Abusing **STIMULANTS** may cause heart failure or seizures. These risks are increased when stimulants are mixed with other medicines—even OTC ones. Taking too much of a stimulant can cause a dangerously high body temperature or an irregular heartbeat. Taking several high doses over a short period of time may make you aggressive or paranoid. Stimulant abuse can lead to physical dependence and withdrawal.

The dangers of prescription drug abuse can be made even worse if you ingest the drugs in a way they aren't supposed to be taken. Ritalin may seem harmless but if you snort or inject Ritalin, it can be serious. And because there can be many variations of the same medication, the dose of medication and how long it stays in the body may vary. If you don't have a prescription you may not know what you really have.

Probably the most common result of prescription drug abuse is addiction. If you abuse medications you can become addicted just as easily as if you take street drugs. The reason many drugs have to be prescribed by a doctor is because some of them are quite addictive. That's one of the reasons most doctors won't usually renew a prescription unless they see you—they want to examine the patient to make sure you are not becoming addicted.

Many different signs can point to drug addiction. The most obvious is the dependence on the drug—the need for the drug. Changes in mood, weight or interests are other signs of drug addiction.

TIPS FOR TAKING PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION

If a doctor prescribes a pain medication, stimulant, or depressant, follow the directions exactly. Here are some other ways to protect yourself:

- Keep all doctor's appointments. Your doctor will want you to visit often so he or she can monitor how well the medication is working for you and adjust the dose or change the medication as needed.
- Make a note of the effects the drug has on your body and emotions, especially in the first few days as your body gets used to it. Tell your doctor about these.
- Keep any information your pharmacist gives you about any drugs or activities you should steer clear of while taking your prescription. Reread it often to remind yourself of what you should avoid. If the information is too long or complicated, ask a healthcare provider or your pharmacist to give you the highlights.
- Don't increase or decrease the dose of your medication without checking with your doctor's office first—no matter how you're feeling.

Finally, never use someone else's prescription. And don't allow a friend to use yours. Not only are you putting your friend at risk, but you could suffer, too: Pharmacists won't refill a prescription if a medication has been used up before it should be. And if you're found giving medication to someone else, it's considered a crime and you could find yourself in court.