



Stay Ahead of Substance Abuse

Prescription Drugs:

What every parent and caregiver needs to know about prescription drugs

Prescription drug abuse typically occurs with **painkillers** such as oxycodone (Oxycontin) and those containing hydrocodone (Vicodin), **anxiety medications** and **sedatives**, such as alprazolam (Xanax) and diazepam (Valium), and hypnotics such as zolpidem (Ambien), used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders, and **stimulants** such as Adderall and Ritalin, used to treat ADHD.

While a common **myth** holds that prescription drugs are not as dangerous as “street” or illegal drugs,

Abusing prescription (RX) and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs can be just as dangerous, addictive and even deadly as using ‘street’ drugs. *Misusing* prescription drugs can be just as dangerous as *Abusing* them.

There might be some confusion between misuse and abuse. The main difference has to do with the individual’s intentions or motivations for taking the drug. For example, let’s say that a person knows that he will get a pleasant or “high” feeling by taking the drug, especially at higher doses than prescribed. That is an example of *abuse* because that person is specifically looking for that pleasant feeling or “high.”

In contrast, if a person isn’t able to fall asleep after taking a single pill, they may take another pill an hour later, thinking, “That will do the job.” Or a person may offer his headache medicine to a friend who is in pain. Those are examples of drug *misuse*, because even though these people did not follow medical instructions, they were not looking to “get high” from the drugs. They were treating themselves, but not according to the directions of their health care providers.

However, no matter the intentions or motivations, **both misuse and abuse can be harmful and life threatening to the individual.** This is because taking a drug other than the way it is prescribed can lead to dangerous outcomes that the person may not anticipate.

Signs and symptoms of prescription drug abuse or misuse:

Opioid painkillers	Sedatives and anti-anxiety	Stimulants
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	medications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constipation • Depression • Low blood pressure • Decreased breathing rate • Confusion • Sweating • Poor coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drowsiness • Confusion • Unsteady walking • Poor judgment • Involuntary and rapid movement of the eyeball • Dizziness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight loss • Agitation • Irritability • Insomnia • High blood pressure • Irregular heartbeat • Restlessness • Impulsive behavior

- Frequent requests for refills from physicians
- Losing prescriptions and requesting replacements regularly
- Crushing or breaking pills
- Stealing or borrowing prescription medications from family members, friends, or co-workers
- Consuming prescriptions much faster than indicated
- Visiting multiple doctors for similar conditions
- Inconsistent answers to questions about prescription usage
- Stealing or forging prescriptions
- Consumption of over-the-counter drugs for the same conditions that a doctor has prescribed other medication
- Ordering prescription medications over the internet

Do's and Don'ts

- **DON'T** flush old medications down the toilet
- **DO** regularly go through medicine cabinets to find old medications that need to be disposed
- **DON'T** throw away whole pills in the trashcan
- **DO** place old medications/pills in a plastic bag, add water, and then crush them. Then, mix them in coffee grounds or cat litter before depositing of them in a trashcan
- **DON'T** keep medications where children or pets can get to them. Doing so can result in serious harm and sometimes can result in death

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<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm220112.htm>