

## Guide to Prescription Drug Abuse

### Did You Know?

#### Statistics about prescription drug abuse

- Twenty-two percent of Arkansas high school students say they've abused prescription drugs by the time they're seniors (Arkansas Present Needs Assessment, 2008). This number is higher once you factor in over-the-counter medicine abuse.
- Arkansas sixth graders abuse more prescription drugs than any other substance except alcohol and cigarettes (Arkansas Present Needs Assessment, 2008).
- Sixty-two percent of teens believe most teens get drugs from their parents'/family's medicine cabinets, and 63 percent of teens believe drugs are easy to get from their parents'/family's medicine cabinets, up from 56 percent last year (2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study).
- A majority of teens (8 out of 10) get prescription drugs from friends and relatives by stealing, buying or simply asking for them.
- The Saline County Sheriff's Operation Medicine Cabinet, a program to take back unwanted or unused prescription drugs, gathered nearly 52,000 pills in eight hours back in February 2010.
- Arkansas is among states with the highest rates of non-medical use of pain relievers among 12 to 25 year olds (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).
- One in three teens knows someone who abuses prescription drugs.
- One in three teens thinks there is nothing wrong with using prescription drugs every once in a while.
- Prescription drugs are abused more than cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and methamphetamine combined.
- A part of teen culture involves "pharming parties." It is a party where teens bring various medicines, combine them in a bowl and then each teen takes a handful to get high.
- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, about 18 percent of adults over the age of 60 have problems with prescription drug abuse.

## Most abused drugs

The following table lists the most commonly abused drugs. Whether taking them for pleasure or for a specific reason, be aware that all of these substances are highly addictive. This means that the more you use them, the more you will feel like you need them, with increasing doses.

| Type of drug                                       | Examples   | Their uses   | How they make you feel  |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Strong Pain Relievers</b>                       | Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, Lorcet, Lortab, Actiq, Darvon, codeine, morphine, methadone  | Prescribed to treat moderate to severe pain  | Teens feel high and pleasurable.<br><br>Seniors use them for chronic diseases or recovery.  |
| <b>Stimulants</b>                                  | Adderall, Dexedrine, Ritalin, Concerta<br><i>(Note: For people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, these drugs will help slow the brain down and focus.)</i>  | Speed up brain activity, resulting in greater alertness, attention and energy. Makes the heart beat faster and puts the user at risk for stroke or heart attack. | Teens turn to these to feel alert and be able to pull all-nighters, stay on top of coursework or perform better in sports.  |
| <b>Sedatives (tranquilizers)</b>                   | Valium, Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, Restoril, Ambien, Lunesta, Mebaral, Nembutal, Soma<br>Muscle relaxers also fall in this category.   | Slows down brain activity.   | Feel calmer, drowsy, relieve stress or help you sleep.  |
| <b>Cough Syrup (Over-the-counter formulations)</b> | <b>Active ingredient: Dextromethorphan.</b><br>Found in Coricidin HBP Cough and Cold, Triaminic, Dimetapp DM, Robitussin, Sudafed, Vicks NyQuil LiquiCaps, Alka-Seltzer Plus Cold & Cough Medicine, Dayquil LiquiCaps, Vicks Formula 44, Benylin DM, Pertussin, Tylenol Cold, etc. | Substance related to codeine. Used correctly, it is an effective cough suppressant.  | Used in high doses produces dissociative experiences. Also euphoria, hallucinations, vivid imaginations. Even greater doses can produce psychosis or out-of-body experiences. |

## Reasons why people get addicted

| Teens abuse   | Seniors develop dependencies  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They're easy to get, especially in family medicine cabinets or from other friends.</li><li>• It's easy not to get caught; many adults, including parents, are not aware of this problem.</li><li>• Thrill seeking/feelings of invincibility.</li><li>• Friends are doing it.</li><li>• Easy to share drugs.</li><li>• They feel prescription drugs are safer, even if not prescribed by a doctor.</li><li>• We are a pill taking society and teens notice it!<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Lots of ads about drugs.</li><li>◦ 7/10 patients leave a doctor's office with a prescription.</li><li>◦ Many people don't use their medicines properly.</li></ul></li><li>• Escape problems/self-medicate.</li><li>• Lack of self esteem.</li><li>• Seen as safer alternative with fewer side effects.</li><li>• Less stigma associated with Rx drugs.</li><li>• Parents less likely to disapprove.</li><li>• They're looking for help.</li></ul> <p>Unlike with other forms of adolescent drug use, the desire to feel good or get high ranks much lower as a motivator for prescription drug misuse. More often, teens turn to prescription drugs to help manage their daily lives – for example, to lower stress and anxiety, stay up all night to study, boost their mood or increase performance in school or sports.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seniors consume over one-third of all prescription drugs in the United States.</li><li>• Seniors are less compliant with their medication schedules.</li><li>• Seniors mix medicines.</li><li>• Seniors are more isolated than younger age groups.</li><li>• As seniors get older, they develop dependencies that encourage addictive behaviors. For example, sometimes getting older means not being able to do social things like before or not being able to function in daily life by getting around as easily as before. In these instances, it is easier to pop a pill as long as it helps to continue living independently.</li></ul> <p>Frequently, abuse of medicines by older adults goes unrecognized by physicians and family members.</p> <p>Physicians often fail to recognize medicine abuse because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of awareness. They simply don't think to look for it.</li><li>• Embarrassment at the thought of suggesting their elderly patient might be accused of drug abuse.</li><li>• Failure to perceive the importance of addressing the problem</li><li>• The idea that "they're old, let them have a little pleasure."</li><li>• Patients often do not communicate with their doctors all of the medicines they are taking.</li><li>• Sometimes patients seek out numerous physicians to get various prescriptions of certain medicines, such as valium.</li></ul> |

## Signs of medication abuse

| Physical signs with Stimulants   | Physical signs with Sedatives  | Physical signs with Painkillers  | Behavioral signs   |
|--|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hyperactivity</li><li>• Shaking</li><li>• Sweating</li><li>• Bloodshot eyes</li><li>• Pupils larger or smaller than usual</li><li>• Fast/irregular heart beat</li><li>• Elevated body temperature</li><li>• Seizures</li><li>• Paranoid/nervousness</li><li>• Repetitive behaviors</li><li>• Appetite changes</li><li>• Sleep pattern changes</li><li>• Sudden weight changes</li><li>• Poor grooming</li><li>• Tremors</li><li>• Slurred speech</li><li>• Impaired coordination</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Impaired coordination</li><li>• Slowed breathing</li><li>• Slowed reflexes</li><li>• Slurred speech</li><li>• Coma</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sleep deprivation</li><li>• Constricted pupils</li><li>• Watery or droopy eyes</li><li>• Nausea, vomiting</li><li>• Constipation</li><li>• Slow or slurred speech</li><li>• Walking slowly</li><li>• Dry skin, itching, skin infections</li><li>• Constant flu-like symptoms</li><li>• Track marks</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sudden mood changes</li><li>• Personality changes</li><li>• Extreme changes in friends</li><li>• Forgetfulness</li><li>• Clumsiness</li><li>• Dishonesty</li><li>• Unaccounted time from school or work</li><li>• Avoiding eye contact</li><li>• Losing interest in personal appearance and activities</li><li>• Changes in appetite</li><li>• Borrowing money or having extra cash</li><li>• Angry/abusive</li><li>• Engaging in reckless behavior</li><li>• Visiting pro-drug websites</li></ul> |

**What about you? Oftentimes adults will deny they have a problem. Ask yourself these questions:**

- Do you feel like you can't stop, even if you wanted to?
- Do you ever feel bad or guilty about your medicine use?
- Do you need to use medicines to relax or feel better?
- Do your friends or family members complain or worry about your medicine use?
- Do you hide or lie about your medicine use?
- Have you ever done anything illegal in order to obtain medicine?
- Do you spend money on medicines that you really can't afford?
- Do you ever use more than one medicine at a time for reasons not immediately prescribed by your doctor?

If you answered "yes" to one or more of the questions, you may have a drug problem. Talk to your doctor or someone you trust about this.

## What can you do?

If you suspect someone in your life has as a problem:

- Inform others who work or spend time with teenagers about this problem.
- Protect yourself and don't put yourself in a dangerous situation.
- NEVER cover for the user.
- Avoid self blame.

## You can prevent this problem from spreading!

*Check to see how many preventive behaviors you have engaged in and ACT! There is no better time than the present!*

- Act locally. Get yourself involved in bringing speakers in to your community to raise more awareness.
- If you've already established a good rapport with a teenager, take this opportunity to start a dialogue. Question you can ask are:
  - Has anyone asked if you or your family have any leftover prescription medications that they can have or buy?
  - Have you ever shared your medicine with a friend?
  - What do you and your friends do after school or at parties these days?
  - Do any of your classmates use prescription drugs? Which ones?
- Participate/volunteer in teen clubs that promote healthy behaviors such as SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions). Distribute literature about prescription drug abuse.
- Become trained in presenting on prescription drug abuse and present to your church, to parent teacher associations or anywhere else you think you might make a difference.
- Tell other parents about the issue. Be a resource.
- If you overhear teenagers talking about "pharming" parties or specifics about abusing drugs, report it to a school administrator.
- Pay attention to the signs.
- Inform healthcare professionals if this is a problem.
- Store** your medicines in your home wisely, as you would your valuables. Lock them preferably, especially if you have controlled substances. Keep them out of sight, especially if you have teenagers visiting your home or if you will be selling your home.
- Monitor** your medicines for pill counts regularly.
- Dispose** of medicine when you no longer need it or if it has expired. Sort through your medicines every six months.
- Model proper behavior. Use medicine responsibly, preferably away from children watching you take it.

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