

Teen Abuse of Prescription and Over-the-Counter (OTC) Drugs

More teens abuse prescription drugs than any illicit drug except marijuana. Because these drugs are so readily available, teens who wouldn't otherwise touch illicit drugs might abuse prescription drugs.

And not many parents are talking to them about it, even though teens report that parental disapproval is a powerful way to keep them away from drugs.

Every day, over 2000 youth ages 12-17 abuse a pain reliever for the very first time.

Prescription drugs provide benefits when used correctly under the care of a health care provider, but when abused, they can be just as dangerous as illicit drugs.

Teens are abusing some prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs to get high. This includes **painkillers**, such as those drugs prescribed after surgery; **depressants**, such as sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs; and **stimulants**, such as those drugs prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Teens are also abusing over-the-counter drugs such as cough and cold remedies.

Common Brand Names of some of these drugs include:

Painkillers: Vicodin, Tylenol with Codeine, OxyContin, Percocet

Depressants: Klonopin, Nembutal, Soma, Valium, Xanax

Stimulants: Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine, Ritalin

OTC's: Coricidin HBP Cough and Cold, Robitussin, Vicks Formula 44 Cough Relief and others

There are serious health risks.

A single large dose of prescription or over-the-counter painkillers or depressants can cause breathing difficult that can lead to death. Stimulant abuse can lead to hostility or paranoia, or the potential for heart system failure or fatal seizures. Even in small doses, depressants and painkillers have subtle effects on motor skills, judgment and ability to learn, which can increase the risk of injury. The abuse of OTC cough and cold remedies can cause blurred vision, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, coma and even death.

Many teens report mixing prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and alcohol. Using these drugs in combination can cause respiratory failure and death. Many of these drugs can be addicting. Teens who first abuse prescription drugs before age 16 also have a greater risk of drug dependence later in life.

70% of people age 12 and older who abuse prescription painkillers say they get them from relatives or friends. Others may abuse their own prescription medicine. Teens also report that these drugs are not hard to find.

The number of treatment admissions for prescription painkillers increased by more than 400% between 1997 and 2007.

How can I tell if my teen is abusing these drugs?

Signs and symptoms that your teen might be using prescription and/or OTC drugs vary, but may include:

- constricted pupils
- slurred speech
- flushed skin
- personality changes
- mood swings
- irritability
- excessive energy
- sleepiness or avoiding sleep
- sweating
- loss of appetite
- forgetfulness
- clumsiness

Watch for signs around the house such as missing pills, unfamiliar pills, or empty cough and cold medicine bottles or packages.

If your teen has a prescription, keep control of the bottle. Be alert to your teen running out of pills quickly, losing pills or requesting refills.

Other signs might include secretiveness, loss of interest in personal appearance, borrowing money or having extra cash, skipping classes, or not doing well in school.

Think about your home. What prescription and over-the-counter drugs do you have? Where are they kept? Would you know if some were missing? The good news is that you can take steps immediately to limit access to these drugs and help keep your teen drug-free.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Safeguard all drugs at home. Monitor quantities and control access. Ask friends and family to safeguard their prescription drugs as well.

Set clear rules for teens about all drug use, including not sharing medicine and always following the medical provider's advice and dosages.

Be a good role model by following these same rules with your own medicines.

Properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medicines in the trash.

The material found in this document has been adapted from the brochure "The Abuse of Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs" available at <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/POTC-08> .