



Better Safe!



WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

Medications: Use As Directed

The Risks Of Prescription Drug Abuse

Prescription drugs help millions of people live longer and healthier lives. But if you don't take your medicines as directed or if you take someone else's medications, the results can be deadly. Unfortunately, prescription drug abuse is all too common in the United States.

Misuse of prescription medications affects people of all ages and races. Indeed, medication abuse can affect ordinary people—maybe even someone you know. A federal survey in 2008 found that about one in five people ages 12 and up said they'd taken a prescription drug for nonmedical purposes at least once in their lifetimes.

People abuse prescription drugs for many reasons, including to get high, lose weight or build muscle. But this abuse carries a serious risk of addiction. And it can lead to other health problems, including irregular heartbeats, seizures, breathing problems and personality changes. Car accidents and physical injury are other concerns.

Common Misconceptions

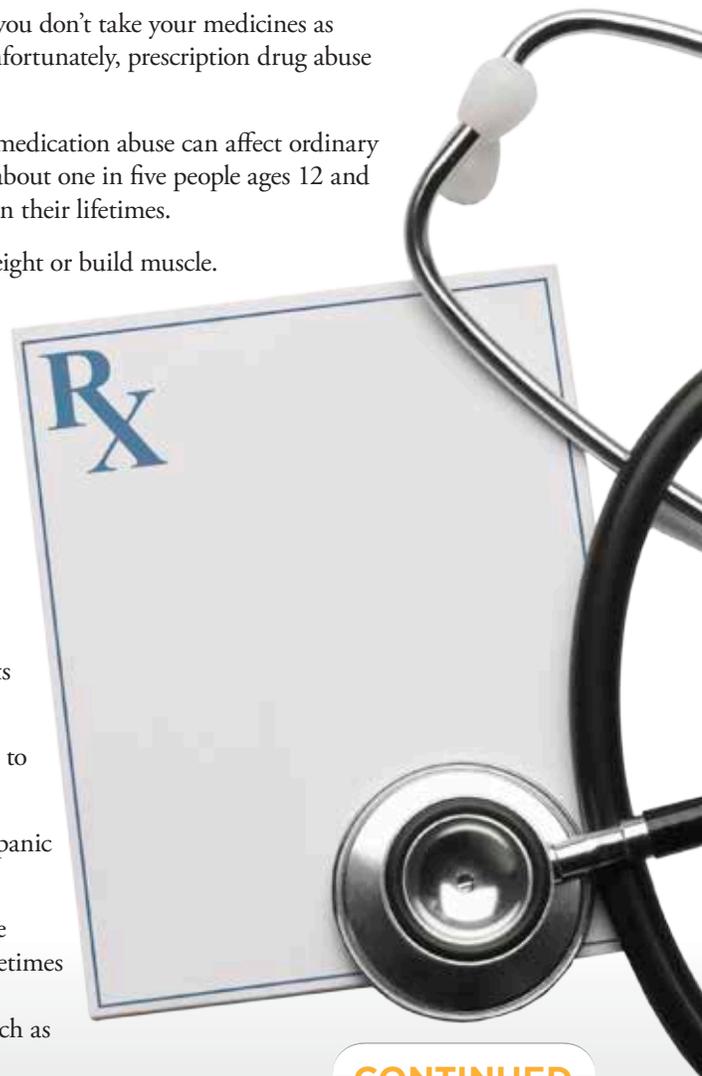
There's a myth that prescription drugs are safe because they come from a drugstore. However, these medicines can have different effects on different people. In other words, a dose that's perfectly safe for one person who's taken the drug for a long time may be potentially lethal for another. And when you combine drugs with other substances, like alcohol, you're taking a great risk.

The three categories of drugs most commonly abused are stimulants, depressants and painkillers.

Stimulants—including Adderall, Dexedrine and Ritalin—are often prescribed to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Depressants—such as Ativan, Valium and Xanax—are used to treat anxiety, panic attacks and sleep disorders.

Prescription painkillers like opioids can effectively manage pain and rarely cause addiction. But because of abuse, opioids and other prescription painkillers, sometimes taken in combination with other drugs, cause nearly half of overdose deaths. Opioids include morphine, codeine, hydrocodone (Vicodin) and oxycodone (such as OxyContin, Percodan or Percocet).



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Warning Signs Of Abuse

There are warning signs to watch for if you think someone you know may be experiencing a dependency on prescription drugs.

Increased Usage – Over time, it is common for individuals taking prescription medications to grow tolerant to the effects of their prescribed dose.

Severe Mood Swings – Changes in a person's normal behavior can be a sign of dependency. Shifts in energy, mood, and concentration may occur as every day responsibilities become secondary to the need for the relief the prescription provides.

Social Isolation – A person experiencing a dependency problem may withdraw from family, friends and other social interaction.

Time Spent on Obtaining Prescriptions – Someone addicted to pills will spend large amounts of time driving great distances and visiting multiple doctors to obtain the drugs. Watch for signs that he or she seems preoccupied with a quest for medication, demonstrating that the drug has become their top priority.

Change in Daily Habits and Appearance – Personal hygiene may diminish as a result of a drug addiction. Sleeping and eating habits may change, and a person may have a constant cough, runny nose and red, glazed eyes.

Neglects Responsibilities – A dependent person may call in sick to work more often, and neglect household chores and bills.

Increased Sensitivity – Normal sights, sounds and emotions might become overly stimulating to the person. Hallucinations, although perhaps difficult to monitor, may occur as well.

Blackouts and Forgetfulness – Another clear indication of dependence is when the person regularly forgets events that have taken place and appears to be suffering blackouts.

Defensiveness – When attempting to hide a drug dependency, abusers can become very defensive if they feel their secret is being discovered. They might even react to simple requests or questions by lashing out.

Prescription Meds: Take Exactly As Directed

If you have prescription medications, take them exactly as directed. And if you have prescriptions for commonly abused drugs, maintain control of them so they don't tempt visitors, as it appears that most people who are abusing prescription drugs are not getting them directly from physicians. In many cases, the drugs are obtained from family or friends who have prescriptions. And make sure to use prescription medications the right way, just as the doctor ordered.

Take Your Medications Properly

- Always follow prescribed directions. Read all the information provided by the pharmacist.
- Never stop taking or change your medication doses without first discussing it with your doctor.
- Be aware of potential interactions with other drugs. Tell your healthcare professional about all the medications and dietary and herbal supplements you're taking.
- Never use someone else's prescription.
- Safeguard medications by keeping track of how much you have and safely disposing of drugs you don't need.

