

The Real Truth



**About Rx and OTC
Medicine Abuse**

Rx and OTCs:

“It’s medicine, so how can it be bad for me?”

Prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are legal products that can help you feel better. But they need to be used only as directed. When abused, when taken for non-medical reasons or in extreme amounts, these medicines can be dangerous. And mixing medications with other medicines, with illegal drugs, or with alcohol can even be deadly. You can never know how these substances will interact with one another or with any health condition you might have.

Rx Drug Abuse

Prescription, or Rx, medicines are important and safe when treating health problems. To be used safely and legally, you must have a prescription and use the medicine according to your doctor’s orders. If prescription medicines are taken for non-medical reasons or at doses not prescribed by a doctor, they can be dangerous, leading to addiction, seizures, heart attacks, or even death.

When used for medical reasons, **pain medications** (opiates or opioids) can be safe and effective when prescribed by a doctor for people with long-term conditions like arthritis or back pain or for short-term pain after surgery. These medicines, however, are the most abused prescription drug class. Since opiates affect the brain and spinal cord, abuse or misuse can lead to addiction or even death.

Another category of prescription drugs that is often abused is **stimulants**, which are used for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and severe obesity. When stimulants are abused, people can become addicted to these drugs, and may take higher and higher doses. They may feel very angry or suspicious of other people. There are also physical dangers. The stimulant abuser might experience a very high body temperature, irregularities in heartbeat, and possibly a heart attack or seizure.

Sedatives and **tranquilizers** are prescribed for people who are nervous or anxious, or who can't sleep. People who abuse sedatives and tranquilizers become dependent on them, take higher and higher doses, and may experience poor memory and judgment, lack of coordination, and even ideas about suicide. Suddenly stopping these drugs is a shock to the brain that can cause seizures. Combining sedatives and tranquilizers with painkillers can cause your breathing and your heartbeat to slow down to a dangerously low point, and even can result in death.

OTC Cough Medicine Abuse

When you are at home sick with a cough, your parents may give you over-the-counter, or OTC, **cough medicine** to help you feel better. When used as directed, it makes sense to take cough medicine when you are sick, but if you take it on purpose in large quantities to get high, you're abusing it. The side effects of abusing these medicines, which contain the active ingredient dextromethorphan, are dangerous: confusion, dizziness, blurred vision, slurred speech, lack of coordination, stomach pain, nausea and vomiting, rapid heartbeat, and not knowing who or where you are. Abusing

dextromethorphan while on certain prescription drugs or while drinking alcohol or taking illegal drugs can even be deadly.



Why Risk It?

So why would anyone take the risk of experimenting with abusing Rx and OTC drugs? Lots of kids think that if parents or friends take them, or if you can buy them at the drugstore, medicines must not be harmful. They might believe that the drugs will make their lives run more smoothly or that they will fit in better with their peers. They also might think that abusing medicines is safer than abusing illegal drugs.

Here's the truth: Medicines work because they contain active ingredients. And those active ingredients affect how your body functions and can interact with one another or other drugs in many different ways. Abusing medicines can lead to embarrassing, dangerous, or even deadly consequences.

In addition to the health risks, there are a number of other types of consequences. Abusing medications, including OTC cough medicines, and getting behind the wheel of a car could get you arrested for drugged driving. And many school districts have strict rules in place for having any sort of medications, so you might risk getting expelled from school by having medicines on you in class or in the halls. So, whether they come from the drugstore or from your family medicine cabinet, using medicines for the wrong reasons poses serious risks to your health, your life, and your future.



Take a Stand

Kids who choose to abuse drugs and alcohol are in the minority. There are a large number of kids who do not abuse drugs and other substances.

Here are some steps you can take to keep drug-free:

1. Rehearse ahead of time how you will refuse drugs if offered. If you feel okay coming on strong, say something like, “No way! I would never do any drugs!” or “Are you kidding? Don’t you know what that stuff does?” If that seems like too much at first, a simple “No, thanks” should do the trick. If it doesn’t, then walk away. The person offering you drugs or alcohol is not a true friend.
2. Avoid threatening situations. If someone’s parents are out of town and everyone is talking about the wild party planned for the weekend, you can be fairly sure drugs or alcohol will be involved.
3. Choose your friends wisely. And be prepared to say goodbye to friends who decide to drink or do drugs.
4. Find healthy ways to deal with stress and have fun. Get involved with music, try out for the school play or your favorite sports team, join a couple of school or church clubs, or volunteer in your community.
5. Get involved in a community coalition. Call 1.800.54 CADCA, ext. 257, to find a coalition near you or to learn about how to start a coalition.

Make the Right Decisions

Sometimes it's easier to make decisions if you "get it all down in black and white." There is no substitute for preparing ahead of time for how you might react or what you can say when presented with uncomfortable situations that involve drugs. The table below lays out some of the choices you might have to deal with in a specific scenario, but there are many other situations in which drugs are involved. In the table below, answer the questions regarding the sample scenario, then come up with more scenarios and the choices you might have to make to deal with that situation.

Sample scenario: You are at a friend's house with some other kids you don't know well, and suddenly someone pulls out medicines and says, "Let's see what happens if we all take these." It seems like everyone else agrees with the idea. How about you? What is the best thing to do?

Read Choice #1. Then read the questions across the top of the table and mark your answers in the boxes: yes, no, or maybe. (The table has been started for you.) Continue on through all the choices and questions. Then circle your best choice.

| CHOICES | QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Will this decision keep me safe? | Will other kids make fun of me? | Will I lose real friends? | Will I regret this decision later? |
| 1. Leave immediately and walk home if you are in a safe area. | yes | maybe | | |
| 2. Tell them about the dangers of medicine abuse. | | | | |
| 3. Threaten to call the police. | | | | |
| 4. Call a parent to pick you up from outside the home if possible. | | | | |
| 5. Try some of the medicine, but tell yourself it will just be this one time. | | | | |
| 6. Go along with the group, but tell a school counselor what is going on the next school day. | | | | |

Help Others

Are you worried about a friend who is abusing? It can be difficult, but here are some suggestions about how you can help.

- Prepare what you are going to say to your friend. Be sure to explain that you are concerned, the real risks of abuse, and how you want to support your friend to get drug-free.
- Pick a place and a time for your talk during which you will not be interrupted.
- Listen, *really listen*, to what your friend says to you and offer to assist him in getting professional help or finding a trusted adult to talk with.
- Be a friend. Keep the conversation going and continue to show him you care.
- Look after yourself, as well. Get support from an adult you trust about the situation. If your friend continues to abuse and refuses professional help, you may have to limit the time you spend with him. Be sure to talk to a trusted adult for advice on what to do.

Get more Information

You can visit the following sites for more information on medicine abuse:

- StopMedicineAbuse.org
- CADCA.org
- toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov
- drugfree.org
- DXMstories.com
- teens.drugabuse.gov
- AbovethelInfluence.com



About CADCA

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) works on behalf of over 5,000 community coalitions across the country to realize its mission of building and maintaining safe, healthy, drug-free communities. Learn more at CADCA.org.



About CHPA

The Consumer Healthcare Products Association (CHPA), founded in 1881, represents the leading manufacturers and distributors of nonprescription, over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and dietary supplements, and engages in a number of initiatives to combat teen OTC cough medicine abuse. Learn more at StopMedicineAbuse.org.



About PhRMA

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) represents the country's leading pharmaceutical research and biotechnology companies, which are devoted to inventing medicines that allow patients to live longer, healthier, and more productive lives. Learn more at PhRMA.org.

This brochure is for informational purposes. For specific questions about medicine abuse, seek professional help.

Additional copies of this brochure can be ordered free of charge from StopMedicineAbuse.org/pubs.



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