

Prescription Drug Misuse Information

Prescription drug misuse happens when a medicine is used in a way that is different from how it was prescribed by the health care provider (*non-medical reason*). This includes:

- Taking more of the medicine than is prescribed.
- Taking another person's medicine.
- Taking the medicine for another reason.



The most common types of misused medicines are painkillers (such as *opiates*), depressants (*tranquilizers* and *anti-anxiety drugs*), and stimulants (*amphetamines*). Prescription drug misuse can cause:

- Addiction.
- Dangerous side effects.
- Overdose, which can be deadly.

How can drug misuse affect me?

You may become addicted

Misusing prescription medicine can lead to addiction. Addiction includes:

- Having a need for the medicine, even though it is affecting your life.
- Needing more and more of the medicine to get the same effect (*tolerance*).
- Feeling sick when you do not take the medicine (*withdrawal*).

Misusing prescription medicine may require treatment for addiction.

You may put your health in danger

Misusing prescription medicines can put your health in danger. Misuse can:

- Affect other medicines that you take and result in dangerous side effects.
- Make you more likely to misuse other drugs, like tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana.
- Cause you to make poor decisions and engage in risky behavior. This can lead to problems at home, school, or work.
- Cause you to overdose.
- Affect your overall health.

Misuse affects a pregnant woman's health and the health of her unborn baby. A baby can also be born with drug addiction and withdrawal symptoms.

What are the effects of misusing medicines?

The effects of misusing prescription medicines depend on the type of medicine you are misusing. They include:

Opiates

- Confusion.
- Nausea.

- Itching.
- Difficulty passing stool (*constipation*).
- A flu-like sickness during withdrawal.
- An inability to breathe if an overdose occurs (*respiratory depression*).

Depressants

- Sleepiness.
- Confusion.
- Seizures if the medicine is stopped.

Stimulants

- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep (*insomnia*).
- Loss of appetite.
- Anxiety.
- False fears or beliefs (*paranoia*).
- Fatigue and depression during withdrawal.
- Overdose. This can cause a dangerous high body temperature, heart failure, or a seizure.

What actions can I take to prevent drug misuse?

To prevent drug misuse:

- **Do not** take another person's medicines.
- **Do not** take a prescription medicine without a legal prescription.
- **Do not** take more of a medicine than was prescribed.
- **Do not** take a medicine in a different way than it was prescribed, such as snorting, crushing, or injecting.
- **Do not** take a medicine to feel high, relaxed, or energized.
- **Do not** take a stimulant to lose weight or improve mental alertness.

Where to find more information

- National Institute on Drug Abuse: drugabuse.gov
- Foundation for a Drug-Free World: drugfreeworld.org
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: samhsa.gov

Contact a health care provider if you:

- Are misusing a prescription medicine and need help stopping.
- Are pregnant and misusing a prescription medicine.
- Need more of a medicine to get the same effects.
- Have withdrawal symptoms if you try to stop taking the medicine.
- Are unable to stop misusing a prescription medicine even though it is affecting your life.

Summary

- Prescription drug misuse happens when a medicine is used in a way that is different from how it was prescribed by the health care provider (*non-medical reason*).
- The most common types of misused medicine are painkillers, depressants, and stimulants.
- Misusing a prescription medicine can cause you to become addicted and may put your health in danger.
- Contact a health care provider if you are misusing medicines and need help stopping.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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