

Drug Abuse Can Be As Close As Your Medicine Cabinet



County of
San Diego
Health and
Human Services



Alcohol and Drug
Services (ADS)



Drug Abuse Can Be As Close As Your Medicine Cabinet

Did you know that prescription drugs are the second most abused drugs by teens behind marijuana and the third is cough syrup? It's very possible that this growing trend could be affecting someone you know.

Teens have learned that many pills and syrups commonly found in home medicine cabinets can be used either alone or in combination to produce a "high." These pills and syrups include both prescription drugs and over the counter medications (OTC).

Prescription drugs are prescribed by doctors for various medical conditions and are only available with a prescription in pharmacies. A doctor examines their patients and carefully prescribes the medication. The patient is told exactly how they should take the medicine, including things to avoid while taking the drug — such as drinking alcohol, smoking, or taking other medications. They also are aware of potentially dangerous side effects and can monitor patients closely for these. Some commonly abused prescriptions drugs include those prescribed for pain, anxiety and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

OTC drugs are those that can be purchased without a prescription from a doctor. Examples of over the counter drugs include pain relievers, cough syrups and allergy medications to name just a few.

Both prescription and OTC drugs can be deadly if taken incorrectly or without the supervision of a doctor.

Why are teenagers using prescription and over the counter drugs to get high?

- Reasons Teens May Use Prescription and Over the Counter Drugs:
- To be social (hanging out with friends)
 - It's legal and widely available
 - It's easy to find and get (in the medicine cabinet or at the store)
 - It's affordable: cheap or free
 - They think it's safe because it's prescribed or available in the store
 - They think it's non-addictive (since it's



a medicine, they think it can't be that dangerous or addictive)

Many teens don't realize how harmful and even fatal using these prescription and over the counter drugs can be. These drugs are often taken in much higher than prescribed doses and are being mixed with other drugs and/or alcohol to create an addictive and sometimes deadly mixture. Recent deaths from prescription drugs include actor Heath Ledger, model Anna Nicole Smith and her son and rapper ODB from the group Wu-Tang Clan.

What are the dangers?

There are serious health risks related to abuse of prescription drugs. A single large dose of prescription or over-the-counter painkillers or depressants can cause breathing difficulty 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. 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, OTC drugs, and alcohol. Using these drugs in combination can cause respiratory failure and death. (1)

What You Can Do as a Parent:

> BE INFORMED

- Go on-line and find out more information. A good website to check out is: www.theantidrug.com.
- Talk to other parents and teachers to find out what kinds of drugs may be popular at your child's school and what they're doing about it.
- Ask your doctor if the prescriptions they are prescribing can be addictive and if there might be different, non-addictive options available

> MONITOR ACCESS

- Keep unused medication in a secure location and dispose of unneeded medication discreetly
- Keep track of refills on regularly used medications
- Take note of the number of pills in a bottle

> TALK TO YOU KIDS

- Tell your children about the dangers of misusing/abusing over the counter and prescription drugs
- Let them know that these drugs can be just as addictive as other illegal drugs

> GET HELP

- If your teen already has a problem, reach out and get help from friends, family and treatment support in your community



- The County of San Diego has a variety of free and low-cost services for teens and their families.

If you would like more information on these services, please call the Access and Crisis Line toll free at 1-800-477-3339. Trained counselors are there to assist you 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.



(1) What are the dangers? The anti-drug http://www.theantidrug.com/drug_info/prescription_dangers.asp