

Generation Rx

Preventing the Misuse and Abuse of Prescription Medications

Frequently Asked Questions

Which types of prescription medications are most commonly abused?

The types of medications most commonly abused are prescription painkillers (e.g., OxyContin®, Vicodin®), sedatives/tranquilizers (e.g., Valium®, Xanax®), and stimulants (e.g., Adderall®, Ritalin®).

Why would the government approve these medications, and why would doctors prescribe them, if they are not safe?

Prescription medications used properly under medical supervision have the ability to prevent or cure disease and alleviate symptoms, but any medication also has the potential for harm. That is why they require a prescription, so that a qualified health professional has evaluated the risks and benefits for their use in a specific patient and will monitor the outcomes of their use.

Why shouldn't I use someone else's prescription medications if I think I have the same condition?

Only a qualified health professional can appropriately diagnose disease and evaluate whether or not a specific medication is right for you. Everyone's condition and health statistics are different, therefore, what is right for one person may not be right for another.

What's wrong with using prescription stimulants to help me think more clearly?

Prescription stimulants can be very effective in treating appropriately-diagnosed conditions (e.g., ADHD). However, these types of drugs have potential negative health consequences, especially when used without medical supervision. Furthermore, while they can clearly help a person focus more intently on their work, there is no evidence that they enhance learning. In addition, it is against federal laws to obtain these medications without a prescription.

Are non-prescription medications of concern?

Any medication has the potential to help us live better lives if used appropriately, but they also have the potential to do harm. Non-prescription medications are no exception and should only be used as directed. The ingredients of some non-prescription medications (e.g., cough & cold medications containing dextromethorphan) are sometimes abused for the feelings they cause, and poison control center calls as well as emergency department visits relating to these products have increased significantly as a result.

Why are certain substances addicting and others not?

Any drug that activates a certain pathway in the brain (called the reward center) has the potential to be addictive. Just like many illegal street drugs, some prescription medications do this and, therefore, can be addictive as well. Drug treatment admissions for those addicted to prescription drugs have escalated substantially in recent years.

How should I store these types of medications?

Many of those who abuse these types of medications (approximately 70%) get them from family or friends, often from the family medicine cabinet. Therefore, it is very important to store these medications in locked and secure areas, protected from those who may wish to abuse them.



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How should I dispose of these types of medications when I no longer need them?

Unused medications may serve as a source of supply for those seeking to abuse them. Therefore, it is important that unused medications be disposed of properly. Dispose of unused medications by taking advantage of community drug take-back programs. If a take back program is not available in your area, The Office of National Drug Control Policy recommends mixing the prescription drug with noxious materials (e.g. coffee grounds or kitty litter), put it in a disposable container and place into the trash. Visit www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.org, www.EPA.gov and www.fda.gov for more information or ask your pharmacist.

If we talk to young people about prescription drug abuse, won't we just teach them to do it?

It is important to use appropriate approaches when educating young people about prescription drug abuse. For example, these behaviors should not be glamorized or shown in a positive light. But in the information age, very specific information about any drug is as close as the Internet. It is imperative to provide factual information to counterbalance the mythical impressions often held by young people.

What should I do if I or someone I know has a problem relating to the misuse or abuse of medications?

It is important to seek professional assistance when confronting any substance abuse problem. Speaking with a physician, nurse, or pharmacist can be a good start. Drug treatment facilities or counseling centers provide specially trained counselors. For more information, visit www.samhsa.gov.



The Generation Rx Initiative is a trademark of The Ohio State University College of Pharmacy.

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This program is made possible with a grant from the Cardinal Health Foundation.

