

Prescription Drug Abuse Awareness

Prescription drug abuse refers to the intentional misuse of a medication outside of the normally accepted standards of its use.

While most people use medication responsibly, prescription drug abuse continues to be a growing problem in the U.S., according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The three groups of prescribed medication most commonly abused are:

- Opioids painkillers, such as oxycodone (OxyContin) and those containing hydrocodone (Vicodin). Signs of improper use or abuse include: constipation; depression; low blood pressure; decreased respiration rate; confusion.
- Sedatives and tranquilizers, such as diazepam (Valium) and lorazepam (Ativan). Signs of improper use or abuse include: drowsiness; confusion; unsteady walk or gait; impaired judgement; involuntary/rapid movement of the eyeball.
- Stimulants, such as methylphenidate (Ritalin). Signs of improper use or abuse include: weight loss, agitation, irritability; insomnia, high blood pressure; irregular heartbeat.

There are serious medical risks involved with the improper use of prescribed medication, in addition to the risk of addiction, which can vary according to the class or group of medication. Keep in mind that you can also become dependent on over-the-counter pain relievers if not taken correctly. Taking nonprescription analgesics daily or almost daily can result in “rebound” pain whenever you stop taking the pills.

There are steps that you can take in order to ensure that you are using prescription medication appropriately, including:

- Providing your healthcare provider with a complete written medical history along with the reason for your visit to ensure he/she can prescribe appropriate medication.
- Providing your healthcare provider with a list of all medications you are currently taking, including over-the-counter medication and herbal supplements.
- Taking the prescription only as prescribed. Do not stop taking the medication or changing the dosage before consulting with a healthcare provider.
- Never using another person’s prescription.
- Keeping all prescriptions in a locked cabinet and disposing of unused pills properly. The FDA generally recommends that unused medication be taken out of its original container and mixed with coffee or kitty litter. For more information on proper disposal, visit: <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm>

If you think you or a loved one may be addicted to prescription medication, talk with your healthcare professional about appropriate treatment and support.

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: 800.327.2384

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