

Prescription Drug Abuse



Prescription drug abuse can occur when medicines are not taken as directed. Examples include:

- Taking a medicine that was prescribed for someone else
- Taking a larger dose than what the prescription calls for
- Using the medicine for a purpose other than what it was prescribed for
- Taking medicine in different ways than directed, such as crushing tablets to snort or inject

Some of the most commonly abused prescription medications include opioids, central nervous system depressants, and stimulants.

- **OPIOIDS** – these are typically used to treat and manage pain. Examples are fentanyl (Duragesic®), hydrocodone (Vicodin® and Lortab®), and oxycodone (OxyContin®). Overuse of opioids can lead to constipation, slowed breathing, and confusion.
- **CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM DEPRESSANTS** – these are often used to treat sleep disorders and manage anxiety. Examples include diazepam (Valium®), alprazolam (Xanax®), and zolpidem (Ambien®). Symptoms of abuse include memory problems, impaired judgment, drowsiness, confusion, and psychomotor impairment.
- **CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM STIMULANTS** – these are used to increase mental alertness and attention span. Examples are amphetamine (Adderall®), methylphenidate (Ritalin® and Concerta®), and dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine®). Abuse can lead to increased heart rate, loss of appetite, and changes in behavior, including psychosis.

The overuse and abuse of prescription medications is a growing public health problem. It is estimated that 52 million Americans have abused prescription medications at least once, and 16.3 million people misuse prescriptions in a year.

How can you recognize prescription drug abuse?

- Sudden changes in behavior, personal appearance, and attitude.
- Changes in social relationships.
- Lack of personal hygiene and poor overall health.
- Changes in work performance.

How you can prevent prescription drug abuse?

- Take your medications only as directed by your doctor or healthcare professional.
- Do not share your medications with anyone.
- Keep your medications at high risk for abuse locked up in a safe place.
- Keep track of how much of your medication you have taken so that you can tell if any is missing.
- Speak with your doctor or healthcare professional about any concerns you may have about your prescription medicines, such as side effects or dosing.
- Dispose of unused or unwanted prescription medications. See <https://bit.ly/30inQGx> for drug take back locations.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, call or text 988 for help.

To connect with Behavioral Health Care Management, call toll free **1-800-277-2198 (TTY 711)** Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST. If you call after hours, leave a voicemail and your call will be returned the next business day.

Additional resources can be found at [samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov).



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