

PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION ABUSE BASICS

From the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Brief Description

Prescription drug abuse means taking a prescription medication that is not prescribed for you, or taking it for reasons or in dosages other than as prescribed. Abuse of prescription drugs can produce serious health effects, including addiction. Commonly abused classes of prescription medications include opioids (for pain), central nervous system depressants (for anxiety and sleep disorders), and stimulants (for ADHD and narcolepsy). Opioids include hydrocodone (Vicodin®), oxycodone (OxyContin®), propoxyphene (Darvon®), hydromorphone (Dilaudid®), meperidine (Demerol®), and diphenoxylate (Lomotil®). Central nervous system depressants include barbiturates such as pentobarbital sodium (Nembutal®), and benzodiazepines such as diazepam (Valium®) and alprazolam (Xanax®). Stimulants include dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine®), methylphenidate (Ritalin® and Concerta®), and amphetamines (Adderall®).

Street Names

oxy, cotton, blue, 40, 80 (OxyContin®)

Effects

Long-term use of opioids or central nervous system depressants can lead to physical dependence and addiction. Opioids can produce drowsiness, constipation and, depending on amount taken, can depress breathing. Central nervous system depressants slow down brain function; if combined with other medications that cause drowsiness or with alcohol, heart rate and respiration can slow down dangerously. Taken repeatedly or in high doses, stimulants can cause anxiety, paranoia, dangerously high body temperatures, irregular heartbeat, or seizures.

Statistics and Trends

In 2009, 16 million Americans age 12 and older had taken a prescription pain reliever, tranquilizer, stimulant, or sedative for nonmedical purposes at least once in the year prior to

being surveyed. Source: [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) (*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration Web Site*). The NIDA-funded 2010 Monitoring the Future Study showed that 2.7% of 8th graders, 7.7% of 10th graders, and 8.0% of 12th graders had abused Vicodin and 2.1% of 8th graders, 4.6% of 10th graders, and 5.1% of 12th graders had abused OxyContin for nonmedical purposes at least once in the year prior to being surveyed. Source: [Monitoring the Future](#) (*University of Michigan Web Site*).