

Prescription Drug Abuse/Misuse

What's the Difference? Prescription Drug Misuse vs. Abuse

It's important to understand the difference from the outset. It all comes down to intention (FDA, 2010). Taking prescription drugs to feel good or get high is an example of drug abuse. Misusing a medication might include taking your own prescribed medication differently or at a higher dose than was advised by your healthcare professional or self-medicating with someone else's (for example, taking a friend's Percocet to treat a headache, sharing a sleeping aid with a friend who needs a night of good sleep). Whatever the reason, using these medications non-medically — even just once — is very dangerous, and might even be illegal.

College students report misusing or abusing prescription medications to:

- Improve their grades
- Concentrate more in class and maintain focus during late-night study sessions and all nighters
- Diet
- Reduce stress
- Feel good/get high
- Ease nervousness in social scene/partying
- Enhance athletic performance
- Forget about problems

Abusing prescription medications can lead to:

- Increases in blood pressure or heart rate
- Organ damage
- Addiction
- Difficulty breathing
- Seizures

- Heart Attack
- Stroke
- Death

Early signs of abuse include:

- ✓ Using the medication more frequently or at higher doses without a healthcare professional's direction
- ✓ Using the medication compulsively
- ✓ Not being able to carry out normal daily activities because of drug misuse

The Facts Continued:

- The misuse and abuse of prescription medications, especially stimulants, sedative and pain relievers, is a serious and often unaddressed problem on most college campuses.
 - While alcohol consumption and binge drinking remains one of the leading health problems on college campuses, many students also misuse or abuse prescription medications to try to enhance their academic performance, cope with stress or simply to get high.
 - Most college students get these medications from friends or family members either by asking for or stealing them, buying or trading them.
- Misusing or abusing prescription drugs is dangerous and even deadly.
 - Just because these medications are FDA approved, doesn't mean they are safe to misuse. They aren't any safer to abuse than illicit drugs.
 - Regardless of why you use them, taking medications without a prescription or medical oversight of the risks can lead to addiction, overdose, and even death.
 - Taking prescription stimulants (Adderall, Concerta, Ritalin), pain relievers (Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, methadone) and sedatives/tranquilizers (Valium, Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, Ambien) together or mixing them with other drugs or alcohol can result in permanent organ damage, overdose and death. You

could have a seizure or end up in the hospital with serious health problems such as respiratory failure.

- Prescription drug abuse is not the norm and it can jeopardize your future.
 - Although prescription drug abuse is a concern that puts lives at risk, it's important to remember that not everyone is doing it. Most college students know it is not worth the risk to misuse or abuse prescription medications.
 - Those who take prescription drugs for non-medical reasons are at least five times more likely to meet the definition of having a drug abuse problem than students who don't.
 - Taking stimulants to boost academic performance doesn't result in better grades, but it does put your long-term health at risk.
 - Misusing pain relievers and sedatives will only mask your problems, not solve them.
- It is illegal to share your medications with friends or be in possession of someone else's prescription, regardless of the reason. You can be convicted as a drug dealer.
 - Even if it is well intentioned, it is illegal to take a controlled prescription medicine that is not prescribed for you.
- Know when to seek help. Take steps to prevent your medications from falling into the wrong hands.
 - If you have been prescribed medication by your doctor, take it as directed, keep it in a safe, secure place and don't be pressured into sharing it with friends or family. You could put your friends' health at risk if you share your medications and doing so is illegal.
 - Don't save unused medication for a rainy day. Dispose of old or unused medication so it can't be stolen.
 - If you or someone you know is abusing prescription medications, get help before things spiral out of control. Consult your resident

assistant, college health services, college counseling center, family doctor or a local treatment center.

THE 3 R'S FOR SAFE MEDICINE USE

RESPECT the power of medicine and use it properly.

RECOGNIZE that all medicines, including prescription drugs, have risks along with benefits. The risks tend to increase dramatically when medicines are abused.

Take **RESPONSIBILITY** for learning how to take prescription drugs safely and appropriately. Seek help at the first sign of your own or a friend's problem.

<http://www.talkaboutrx.org/documents/GetTheFacts.pdf>

<http://www.talkaboutrx.org/documents/WarningSigns.pdf>

http://www.talkaboutrx.org/college_resource_kit.jsp