

Generation Rx – The Emergence of Teen Prescription Drug Abuse

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ'S)

What are the recent trends in teenage drug use and abuse?

Over the last 10 years, use of illicit drugs, alcohol and cigarettes are down among 12th graders, while the use of prescription drugs is up an alarming 300%.

Nearly 1 in 10 12th graders reporting using prescription type narcotic drugs such as Vicodin or OxyContin according to the 2006, University of Michigan Monitoring the Future Study.

After marijuana, the second most common category of abused drugs among 12th graders is prescription medications. After that, cocaine, ecstasy, methamphetamine and cough medicine (over the counter) are far behind in terms of total users.

What are the drugs that kids are taking?

Prescription drugs being used by teenagers tend to fall into three categories:

- Opiate pain medications like ***Vicodin*** and ***OxyContin***;
- Benzodiazepines or sleeping pills like ***Xanax***, ***Ativan***, ***Valium***, ***Lunesta*** and ***Ambien***.
- ADD/ADHD stimulant medications like ***Ritalin***, ***Dexedrine*** and ***Adderall***.

While the opiates are generally used to get 'high' and the benzodiazepines used to relieve a sense of stress or anxiety, the stimulant medications, usually taken from the legitimate prescriptions of younger brothers or sisters, are often used to study long hours, write papers, or prepare for college boards or admission tests.

Why have prescription drugs become so popular?

They are easy to get; kids get them from their friends, their family medicine cabinet, and the internet - where virtually anyone with a credit card can get literally any prescription drug.

Surprisingly there's a widespread misconception among teens that these medications are **NOT** addicting and that they are less harmful overall than illicit drugs like cocaine, ecstasy, or methamphetamine.

Teens like the way these drugs make them feel. During a point in a teen's life that is often filled with newly experienced feelings of anxiety and uncertainty around relationships, sexuality, peer pressures of many kinds, and especially increased requirements to produce through academic performance, these drugs can make all of this seem a great deal less stressful or worrisome.

Each generation likes to "discover" its own "high". Kids want to believe they have found something new that their older brothers or sisters hadn't known about. This time around, prescription drugs seem to fit that bill.

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How can I tell if a teen is taking prescription medications?

The symptoms of drug use can vary widely and don't always mean that a teen is using any of these drugs. But the symptoms listed below are often associated with drug use:

- Grogginess at odd hours
- Teen seems unsteady on his/her feet or demonstrates a loss of balance
- Unexplained weight loss, or gain
- A hyper-acute sense of secrecy or demand for privacy, even more than you've gotten used to
- Very chatty, or uncommonly friendly, in ways that don't make sense
- Erratic behavior, with sudden mood swings, which might include depression aggression or heightened anxiety
- Restlessness or scratching, especially around the nose or chest
- Slow or slurred speech
- Extreme hyperactivity; talking for long periods about nothing in particular
- Very large (dilated) pupils in the eye, or very small (pinpoint) pupils
- A non-negotiable desire to wear sunglasses indoors or in the evening hours

What can I do if I think my son or daughter is taking prescription drugs?

You can ask your child directly. You'd be surprised how often kids are looking for a way out, and a direct question regarding use, can provide that avenue to come clean and start the process of recovery.

You can also ask your child to submit to a drug test. There are many kinds available. The most common tests are urine or saliva for traces of various drugs. Hair can also be tested, and can identify usage over a much longer period retroactively, sometimes as much as 6 months. Be advised though, these tests do not provide pinpoint accuracy, and can not usually identify one or even two using events. Generally speaking these tests are best to identify a consistent pattern of use.

You should make an appointment to bring your child into a program that has had experience with teen drug abuse and treatment.

Is there a local medical resource that can provide detoxification, stabilization and treatment services for adolescents under 18 years of age and young adults 18-25?

Yes. An innovative medically-based program called "Beat your Addiction Summer 2008" has been specifically structured to allow participants with college or high school commitments to spend an intensive 2-3 week period in treatment, increasing the likelihood that they will be able to begin school as scheduled in the fall. The program is run by Dr. Howard Kornfeld, a noted pain and addiction physician, based in Mill Valley, California.

For many years, one of the treatment options often considered by parents has been a variety of 'wilderness programs.' While a great number of these programs have had considerable success working with drug dependent teens, Dr. Kornfeld has found that in some cases these troubled teens can be more effectively served here in their own communities with strong medical, pharmacological, and psychosocial support and participation in Alcoholics Anonymous or other 12 step programs. This form of treatment acknowledges the medical demands of specific detoxification requirements and the often coexisting psychiatric disorders.

