

# Prescription Drug Abuse

*Imagine for a moment how much more enjoyable and productive life might be if you were free from prescription drug abuse.*

The cost of  
**PRESCRIPTION  
DRUG ABUSE**  
is more than anyone  
can afford.

When it comes to the risk of prescription drug abuse, everyone is susceptible.

Especially common among young people, an estimated 52 million have taken prescription drugs for a nonmedical reason at least once.

## THE CYCLE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

People misuse prescription drugs for many reasons. Social pressures, stress relief, and the need to be alert for work and school are common motivations. Because these medications activate the brain's reward center, you can become addicted easily and continue using them despite serious consequences.

## COMMONLY ABUSED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND

### SYMPTOMS

#### Painkillers

- Can include opioids, or painkillers, such as oxycodone (Oxycontin) and hydrocodone (Vicodin).
- Symptoms of abuse include sweating, confusion, slowed breathing, lower blood pressure, poor coordination, and depression.
- A person abusing opioids is at risk for choking, dangerously low blood pressure and breathing rate, and inducing a coma.

#### Stimulants

- Can include Methylphenidate (Ritalin), used to treat ADHD and sleep disorders.
- Symptoms of abuse include dizziness, poor judgment, rapid eye movement, drowsiness, and imbalance.
- Abusing stimulants places one at risk for heart problems, seizures, paranoia, and hallucinations.

#### Sedatives

- Can include Alprazolam (Xanax) or Zolpidem (Ambien), which are prescribed for anxiety and sleep disorders.
- Symptoms of sedative abuse include restlessness, irregular heartbeat, insomnia, high blood pressure, irritability, and weight loss.
- When sedatives are abused, a person is at risk for memory loss. Overdose can lead to a coma or death.

### RISKS AND CONSEQUENCES

Prescription drug abuse is highest among

young adults; however, older people taking multiple medications are also at risk.

Besides physical symptoms, the consequences of prescription drug abuse are severe. Car accidents, criminal actions, illegal drug use, decreased performance at work or school, and relational problems are all common effects of misusing prescription medications. Judgment is often seriously impaired.

### ACTION STEPS

- ✓ Schedule a visit with your primary care provider to discuss treatment options.
- ✓ Follow primary care provider's treatment recommendations, which may involve detox.
- ✓ Consider participating in a recovery or peer support program.
- ✓ Enlist the support of family and friends and be accountable to them for recovery.
- ✓ Explore the root causes of prescription drug abuse such as when and why it started.

### KEEP IN MIND

You're not alone, and help is available. Consider reaching out to your health care provider and engaging other counseling resources for guidance on next steps.

***What steps will you take today to be well and live life more fully?***