



Pathway to Prevention

teen use & abuse stops here

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Prescription and over-the-counter drugs are the third most commonly abused substances by Americans 14 and older (after marijuana and alcohol).

Parent Awareness Report

Prescription Pain Pill Abuse

The 2014 *Monitoring the Future* report revealed that 6.1% of high school seniors had used prescription pain pills not prescribed for them over the prior year. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), prescription and over-the-counter drugs are the third most commonly abused substances by Americans 14 and older (after marijuana and alcohol). This frequent drug abuse takes place when:

- People take too many of their own pills.
- People take someone else's pills.
- People change the form of pills that were prescribed for them (for example, by crushing them and snorting the powder through a straw; by heating the pill and inhaling the smoke; or melting or "cooking" the pills and injecting them).
- People take medication solely for the purpose of getting high.

Why should parents be alert to prescription pain pill abuse?

- Teens *and* parents tend to overlook the potential danger of prescription pain pill medications, thinking they are "safe" under any circumstance because they are prescribed by a doctor.
- Pain pills are widely available – often as close as your own medicine cabinet - and there is little stigma to their use.
- Unaware of the dangers of mixing drugs with alcohol, teens may create a deadly brew by combining prescription painkillers with other drugs or alcohol.
- Evidence suggests that teens and others who become chemically dependent upon prescription pain pills may resort to heroin when their pill supply dries up.

What are prescription pain pills, anyway?

- Prescription pain medicines called "opioids" come from or are chemically similar to the opium poppy; when abused, they have similar effects to heroin. Commonly abused opioid pain medications include OxyContin™, Vicodin™, Norco™, Opana™ and Percocet™. Street slang for these opioids includes Hillbilly Heroin, Oxy, Roxy, OC, Oxycotton, Percs, Happy Pills, and Vikes.

Here's how pain pills can kill:

- NIDA reports that unintentional overdose deaths involving opioid pain relievers have quadrupled since 1999, and by 2007, outnumbered those involving heroin and cocaine.
- Opioids can affect many parts of the body and result in sleepiness, confusion, nausea, constipation and breathing problems. The risk for overdose and death are increased when people combine opioids with alcohol and other drugs, especially antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications.
- Chemical dependency (“addiction”) can result from pain pill misuse. Chemical dependency to alcohol or other drugs results from a complex interaction of hereditary risk factors and environmental triggers. Some people are more vulnerable to chemical dependency than others.
- Prescription pain pills can be costly and hard to obtain. People who become chemically-dependent on pain pills may resort to heroin, which can be deadly.

Precautions to take and conversations to have:

- Count all your prescription pills and watch for any missing doses. Better yet, keep them under lock and key. Make sure Grandma and Grandpa do the same.
- If your child is prescribed pain medication, talk with doctor and obtain the bare minimum necessary to manage the pain. Ask for a non-prescription alternative to manage the pain. Closely monitor any prescription medication and make sure it is taken as directed. Keep an eye on the quantity of pills; because pain pills command a high price on the open market, sometimes teens sell them, or guests or workers in your home may steal them to abuse or sell.
- Talk with your teen about the dangers of prescription pills. Check out our Parent Awareness Report on Talking with Your Teens about drugs and alcohol to help you with those conversations. Make sure your teen knows that that opioids are dangerous, especially when combined with other drugs.
- Keep an eye out for pills in prescription bottles or baggies in your child's backpack, purse, sports bag or other hiding places.
- If your teen shows signs of intoxication, start drug testing him or her. Let your teens know that drinking or doing drugs is not tolerated and that you will drug test them randomly in the future. This may give your child a welcome face-saving “out” to peers who are pressuring them to use or abuse. Let them blame a drug-testing mom or dad as they bow out of the party scene.
- If you find that your teen is abusing pain pills or other drugs, consider this [guidance and resources](#) from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.



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