



After marijuana, the drugs most commonly abused by teens are prescription medications. Teens use these drugs to get high, to “self-medicate” for anxiety or pain or sleep problems, or even to try to improve school performance. Prescription drugs are in easy reach, available in teens’ own homes.

Common *Misconceptions* about Prescription Drugs

Many adults as well as teens share these *dangerous and false beliefs*:

- Prescription medications, even when not prescribed for you by a doctor, are much safer than “street drugs”.
- Prescription pain relievers are not addictive.
- Stimulants can improve academic performance, even if you do not have ADHD.

Prescription Drugs Most Commonly Misused by Teens

- Pain relievers (such as Vicodin, OxyContin)
- Sedatives and tranquilizers (such as Valium, Xanax)
- Stimulants (such as Ritalin, Adderall)
- OTC Cold Medications (such as Sudafed, Benadryl)

Health Concerns Associated With Teen Prescription Drug Misuse:

- Dependence and addiction (especially to opioids, anti-anxiety drugs and sleep medications)
- Overdose, sometimes fatal (especially to opioids, anti-anxiety drugs and sleep medications)
- Seizures, irregular heartbeat and cardiovascular complications (especially with stimulants)
- Increased risk of suicide

Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse Among Teens

- Talk with teens about the dangers of prescription drug use, equating them with the dangers of “street drugs.”
- Store medications securely in a locked cabinet. Ask grandparents and others to secure their medications as well.
- Dispose of expired or unused medications safely. A list of Rhode Island prescription drug take-back locations may be found at <http://riprc.org/files/2013/09/drugdisposalsites.pdf>.

For more information:

- The Medicine Abuse Project/The Partnership at Drugfree.org at medicineabuseproject.org
- Education Before You Medicate, National Council on Patient Information and Education at www.talkaboutrx.org/rx_program.jsp
- SAMHSA’s National Helpline at 800-662-HELP or 800-662-4357.

Content Sources: SAMHSA 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health
NIDA Topics in Brief: Prescription Drug Abuse, 2011.