

THE 411 ON R_x DRUGS

When taken properly and under a medical doctor's supervision, prescription drugs can have tremendous benefits. Unfortunately, some people take these drugs beyond (or outside of) what is prescribed by a medical doctor, and grow dependent on them. **Teens are no exception.** A new and disturbing teen trend cropping up throughout the U.S. is the abuse of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs for an intentional high, similar to the high from using illegal street drugs.

Why should parents care about this?

Reason #1

There are now more new users (12 and older) of prescription drugs than any other illegal drug—even marijuana.¹

Teens are turning away from street drugs and the stigma that goes along with using them, and abusing prescription drugs to get the same type of high. Many young people are under the false notion that prescription and OTC drugs are medically safer, when in fact they can be just as dangerous and addictive as street drugs, if taken improperly.

Reason #2

Abuse of Prescription Drugs Is Dangerous, Even Fatal

Abusing prescription-type drugs like painkillers, tranquilizers, and sedatives with the intent to get “buzzed” or “high,” can be dangerous, even fatal. When a child fakes symptoms to get a prescription, pops somebody else's pills, mixes medications or alcohol, and/or takes more than the recommended dosage, it can induce serious health problems such as addiction, seizures, and cardiac arrest.

Also, a risky, new activity among some teens is “pharming.” This term is used to refer to the trading of prescription/OTC medications, then ingesting the mix of pills, often with alcohol (which is a depressant), in the hopes of getting high. And teens are not just taking an extra couple of pills here and there. They are ingesting handfuls, sometimes several bottles of pills and cough syrup a day. “Partying” this way is dangerous and often leads to terrible consequences. Overdoses of prescription and OTC drugs accounted for about one-quarter of the 1.3 million drug-related emergency room admissions in 2004, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported in 2006.

Reason #3

Accessibility and Knowledge Gathering

Prescription drugs are easy to get and often free to teens. All they have to do is walk out of their bedroom, down the hall into the bathroom, and look in the medicine cabinet; or for OTC, go to the nearest supermarket. They can also get prescription drugs from friends at school, who have brought them from home or stolen them from a family friend or relative.

The Internet is also an access point for teens to get prescription or OTC drugs. There are many illegal Web sites that don't require a prescription or a medical evaluation, and are all too happy to sell to anyone, including your child. The Web allows teens the ability to create networks of “friends” who can secretly share information and encourage prescription and OTC drug abuse. To

make matters worse, numerous Web sites exist for the sole purpose of providing information about how people can get high off of a particular prescription drug or OTC medicine, such as giving dosages based on height and weight.

Reason #4

Getting Prescription Drugs Without a Prescription is Illegal

In addition, using the Internet to get drugs without a valid prescription is illegal – and may subject a person to arrest and prosecution. Regardless of how you acquire a prescription medication, using these types of drugs without a valid prescription and medical supervision is unsafe. These drugs are intended only for the person they are prescribed for and only to treat the condition for which they are prescribed.

Reason #5

It Doesn't Help Your Teen Reach His Full Potential

Why do some teens abuse prescription and OTC drugs? There are many reasons, but teens often point to boredom, the want to escape, or simply to get high. As a parent, you are the most influential person in your teen's life. If they see you taking prescription or OTC drugs to deal with life's stresses or to change your physical appearance and not for a medical condition, they are likely to imitate that behavior. Talk to your teen about healthy ways to cope with the pressures of the world, like getting involved in music or sports. If you feel strongly that your child does have a significant health problem that could require medication, talk to your family doctor.

¹ Misuse of Prescription Drugs. National Survey on Drug Use and Health SAMHSA. 2006.