

## EFFECTS OF OTHER DRUGS

# TEACHER FACT SHEET: Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medication

**Prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs can be misused and abused.** When a drug is *misused*, the doctor's directions or the directions on the label are not followed. Sometimes people believe that taking more of the drug will help them get well quicker. This is incorrect. Drug instructions are carefully developed and serious consequences like overdosing can occur when instructions are not followed. Both over-the-counter and prescription drugs are *abused* when they are intentionally taken to get high or for some reason other than what the drug is intended to treat. Unintended misuse and deliberate abuse can have the same dangerous consequences.



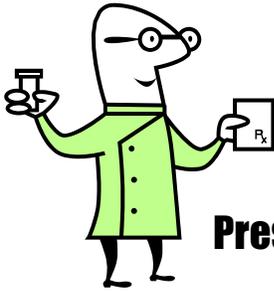
**Prescription drugs are medications that are given to a patient by a doctor to treat a health condition.** Three classes of prescription drugs most commonly abused or misused are opioids, depressants, and stimulants. These drugs can all cause physical dependence and addiction. Physical dependence occurs when the body adapts to the presence of the substance and withdrawal symptoms occur if use is reduced abruptly. Addiction is compulsive, often uncontrollable, drug use in spite of negative consequences.

**Opioids (narcotics) are often prescribed to treat pain.** When taken as prescribed, opioids safely and effectively manage pain and rarely cause addiction. Opioids act by attaching to a specific protein called opioid receptors and change the way people experience pain. They can also affect regions of the brain that control what we perceive as pleasure, resulting in the initial euphoria that the opioids produce. They also produce drowsiness, cause constipation, and depress breathing. Taking a large dose can cause severe respiratory depression or death. If opioids are taken with another substance that slows breathing, such as alcohol, antihistamines, barbiturates, or benzodiazepines, the combination could lead to a life-threatening respiratory depression.



**Central Nervous System (CNS) Depressants are used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders.**

Tranquilizers and sedatives are examples of central nervous system depressants. CNS depressants work by enhancing the activity of the gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) neurotransmitters in the brain, which causes brain activity to slow, producing a drowsy or calming effect. CNS depressants should **not** be combined with any medication or substance that causes sleepiness including prescription pain medicine, over-the-counter cold and allergy medications, or alcohol. This combination can slow breathing, heart rate and respiration, which can be fatal.



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**Stimulants are prescribed to treat narcolepsy** (a disorder characterized by uncontrollable episodes of deep sleep) , **attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and clinical depression.** Research indicates that people with ADHD do not become addicted to stimulant medications, such as Ritalin, when taken in the form and doses prescribed. Taking high doses can cause hostility, a feeling of paranoia, irregular heartbeat, dangerously high body temperature, cardiovascular failure or seizures.

**Over-the-counter drugs are medications that can be bought to treat a health condition without a doctor's prescription.** One common over-the-counter medication that is often misused and abused is Dextromethorphan or DEX, a cough suppressant ingredient found in a variety of over-the-counter cold and cough medications. DEX is a safe and effective cough suppressant when used as directed. When taken in excess, DEX can cause impaired judgment and mental performance, loss of coordination, rigid motor tone and involuntary muscle movement, tremors, excessive sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, slurred speech, nausea, hot flashes, confusion and disorientation, hallucinations, numbness of fingers or toes and irregular heartbeat.

### **REFERENCES:**

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugpages/prescription.html>

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/infofacts/PainMed.html>

Frequently Asked Questions of NIDA's Drug Facts Chat Day

<http://drugabuse.gov/chat/chatfaqs308.html>

Drugs: Shatter the Myths (NIDA)

[http://drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/files/teenbrochure\\_508.pdf](http://drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/files/teenbrochure_508.pdf)