

# THE TRUTH ABOUT PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

# Rx

Black Beauties

Yellows

Reds

Downers

Demmies

Candy

[drugfreeworld.org](http://drugfreeworld.org)

A person with long dark hair is sitting on stone steps, looking down with a distressed expression, their hand resting on their forehead. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with a blurred building facade. The top and bottom edges of the image are decorated with a border of dark, round, leaf-like shapes.

## WHY THIS BOOKLET WAS PRODUCED

There is a lot of talk about drugs in the world—on the streets, at school, on the Internet and TV. Some of it is true, some not.

Much of what you hear about drugs actually comes from those selling them. Reformed drug dealers have confessed they would have said anything to get others to buy drugs.

Don't be fooled. You need facts to avoid becoming hooked on drugs and to help your friends stay off them. That is why we have prepared this booklet—for you.

Your feedback is important to us, so we look forward to hearing from you. You can visit us on the web at [drugfreeworld.org](http://drugfreeworld.org) and e-mail us at [info@drugfreeworld.org](mailto:info@drugfreeworld.org).

# PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

## A SERIOUS PROBLEM

**R**ecreational use of prescription drugs is a serious problem with teens and young adults. National studies show that a teen is more likely to have abused a prescription drug than an illegal street drug.

Many teens think prescription drugs are safe because they were prescribed by a doctor. But taking them for non-medical use to get high or “self-medicate” can be just as dangerous and addictive as taking illegal street drugs.

There are very serious health risks in taking prescription drugs. This is why they are taken only under the care of a doctor. And even then, they have to be closely monitored to avoid addiction or other problems.

Many pills look the same. It is extremely dangerous to take any pill that you are uncertain about or was not prescribed for you. People can also have different reactions to drugs due to the differences in each person’s body chemistry. A drug that was okay for one person could be very risky, even fatal, for someone else.

Prescription drugs are only safe for the individuals who actually have the prescriptions for them and no one else.

# PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

## WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

**D**ue to their potential for abuse and addiction, many prescription drugs have been categorized by the US Drug Enforcement Administration in the same category as opium or cocaine. These include Ritalin and Dexedrine (stimulants), and the painkillers OxyContin, Demerol and Roxanol.

Many illegal street drugs were at one time used or prescribed by doctors or psychiatrists but were later banned when the evidence of their harmful effects could no longer be ignored. Examples are heroin, cocaine, LSD, methamphetamine and Ecstasy.

Abuse of prescription drugs can be even riskier than the abuse of illegally manufactured drugs. The high potency of some of the synthetic (man-made) drugs available as prescription drugs creates a high overdose risk. This is particularly true of OxyContin and similar painkillers, where overdose deaths more than doubled over a five-year period.

Many people don't realize that distributing or selling prescription drugs (other than by a doctor) is a form of drug dealing and as illegal as selling heroin or cocaine, with costly fines and jail time. When the drug dealing results in death or serious bodily injury, dealers can face life imprisonment.

# TYPES OF ABUSED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

**P**rescription drugs that are taken for recreational use include the following major categories:

- 1. Depressants:** Often referred to as central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) depressants, these drugs slow brain function. They include sedatives (used to make a person calm and drowsy) and tranquilizers (intended to reduce tension or anxiety).
- 2. Opioids and morphine derivatives:**\* Generally referred to as painkillers, these drugs contain opium or opium-like substances and are used to relieve pain.
- 3. Stimulants:** A class of drugs intended to increase energy and alertness but which also increase blood pressure, heart rate and breathing.
- 4. Antidepressants:** Psychiatric drugs that are supposed to handle depression.

\* derivative: a chemical substance formed from a related substance.



# DEPRESSANTS

Sometimes called “downers,” these drugs come in multicolored tablets and capsules or in liquid form. Some drugs in this category, such as Zyprexa, Seroquel and Haldol, are known as “major tranquilizers” or “antipsychotics,” as they are supposed to reduce the symptoms of mental illness. Depressants such as Xanax, Klonopin, Halcion and Librium are often referred to as “benzos” (short for benzodiazepines\*). Other depressants, such as Amytal, Nembutal and Seconal, are classed as barbiturates—drugs that are used as sedatives and sleeping pills. Some of the well-known brand and street names:

## BRAND NAMES

- Xanax
- Valium
- Halcion
- Librium
- Ativan
- Klonopin

## STREET NAMES

- Candy
- Downers
- Sleeping pills
- Tranks

## BRAND NAMES

- Amytal
- Nembutal
- Seconal
- Phenobarbital

## STREET NAMES

- Barbs
- Reds
- Red Birds
- Phennies
- Tooies
- Yellows
- Yellow Jackets

\* benzodiazepine: a tranquilizer that acts to relax muscles and calm mental excitement.

# DEPRESSANTS SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

Short-term effects of depressants include:

- Slow brain function
- Lowered blood pressure
- Confusion
- Dizziness
- Fever
- Visual disturbances
- Disorientation, lack of coordination
- Difficulty or inability to urinate
- Slowed pulse and breathing
- Poor concentration
- Fatigue\*
- Slurred speech
- Sluggishness
- Dilated pupils
- Depression
- Addiction

Higher doses can cause impairment of memory, judgment and coordination, irritability, paranoia,<sup>†</sup> and suicidal thoughts. Some people experience the opposite of the intended effect, such as agitation or aggression.

Using sedatives (drugs used to calm or soothe) and tranquilizers with other substances, particularly alcohol, can slow breathing and the heart rate and even lead to death.

\* fatigue: extreme physical or mental tiredness.

† paranoia: suspicion, distrust or fear of other people.

# DEPRESSANTS LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Tolerance to many depressants can develop rapidly, with larger doses needed to achieve the same effect. The user, trying to reach the same high, may raise the dose to a level that results in coma or death by overdose.

Long-term use of depressants can produce depression, chronic fatigue, breathing difficulties, sexual problems and sleep problems. As a dependency on the drug increases, cravings, anxiety or panic are common if the user is unable to get more.

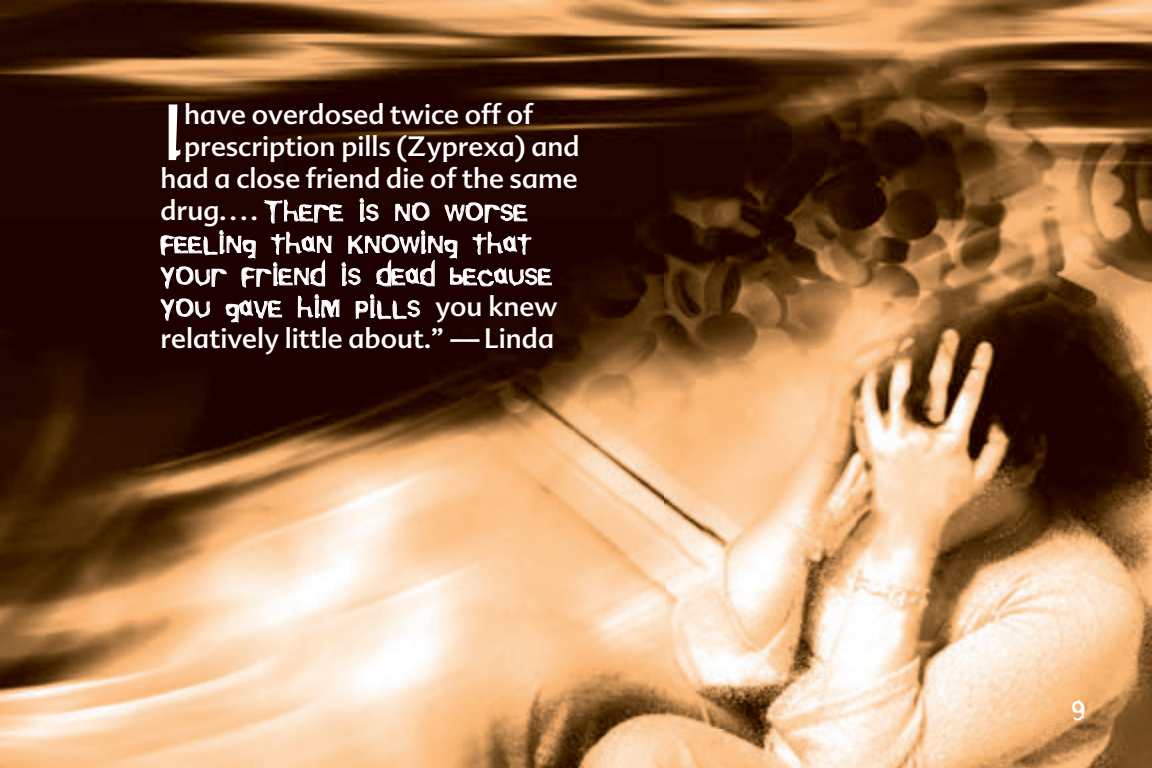
Withdrawal symptoms include insomnia, weakness and nausea. For continual and high-dose users, agitation, high body temperature,

delirium, hallucinations and convulsions can occur. Unlike withdrawal from most drugs, withdrawal from depressants can be life-threatening.

These drugs can also increase the risk of high blood sugar, diabetes, and weight gain (instances of up to 100 pounds have been reported).

In a study conducted by *USA Today*, based on Food and Drug Administration data over a four-year period, antipsychotics (a type of depressant) were the prime suspects in 45 deaths caused by heart problems, choking, liver failure and suicide.



A woman is shown from the chest up, sitting on a couch. She has her hands pressed against her face, covering her eyes, in a gesture of intense grief or despair. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a somber and emotional atmosphere. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a window with curtains and some foliage.

I have overdosed twice off of prescription pills (Zyprexa) and had a close friend die of the same drug.... THERE IS NO WORSE FEELING THAN KNOWING THAT YOUR FRIEND IS DEAD BECAUSE YOU GAVE HIM PILLS you knew relatively little about.” — Linda

# ROHYPNOL

**R**ohypnol is a tranquilizer about 10 times more potent than Valium. The drug is available as a white or olive-green pill and is usually sold in the manufacturer's bubble packaging. Users crush the pills and snort the powder, sprinkle it on marijuana and smoke it, dissolve it in a drink or inject it.

## Brand Name

- Rohypnol

## Street Names

- forget-me pill
- Mexican Valium
- R2
- Roche
- roofies
- roofinol
- rope
- rophies

# ROHYPNOL EFFECTS

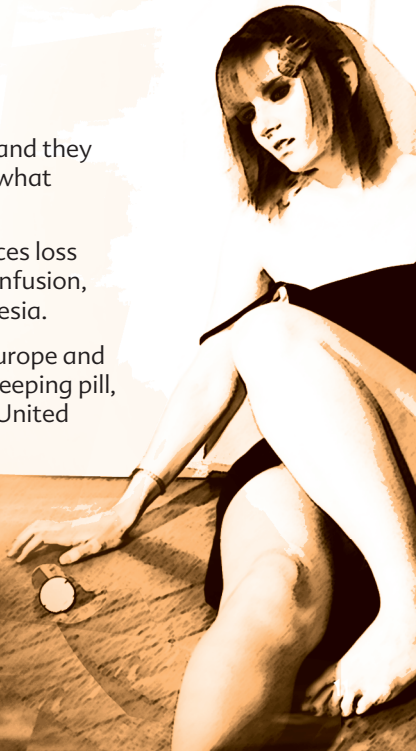
**R**ohypnol has been used to commit sexual assaults because it renders the victim incapable of resisting, giving it the reputation of a “date-rape” drug.

Rohypnol users often describe its effects as “paralyzing.” The effects start 20 to 30 minutes after taking the drug, peak within 2 hours and may persist for 8 or even 12 hours. A person can be so incapacitated (made unable to act) they collapse. They lie on the floor, eyes open, able to observe events but completely unable to move. Afterwards,

memory is impaired and they cannot recall any of what happened.

The person experiences loss of muscle control, confusion, drowsiness and amnesia.

Rohypnol is sold in Europe and Latin America as a sleeping pill, but it is illegal in the United States.



# OPIOIDS AND MORPHINE DERIVATIVES

Opioids are drugs that act on the nervous system to relieve pain. Continued use and abuse can lead to physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms. They come in tablets, capsules or liquid.

Some of the well-known brand and street names:

## BRAND NAMES

- Fiorinal with Codeine
- Robitussin A-C
- Tylenol with Codeine
- Empirin with Codeine

- Actiq
- Duragesic
- Sublimaze

## STREET NAMES

- Captain Cody
- Cody
- Schoolboy
- Doors & Fours
- Pancakes & Syrup
- Loads

- Apache
- China girl
- Dance fever
- Goodfella
- Murder 8

- Tango and Cash
- China white
- Friend
- Jackpot
- TNT

# OPIOIDS AND MORPHINE DERIVATIVES

## SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

### BRAND NAMES

- Roxanol
- Duramorph
  
- OxyContin
- Percodan
- Percocet
- Tylox
  
- Demerol
  
- Dilaudid

### STREET NAMES

- M
- Miss Emma
- Monkey
- White Stuff
  
- Oxy 80
- Oxycat
- Hillbilly heroin
- Percs
- Perks
  
- Demmies
- Pain killer
  
- Juice
- Dillies

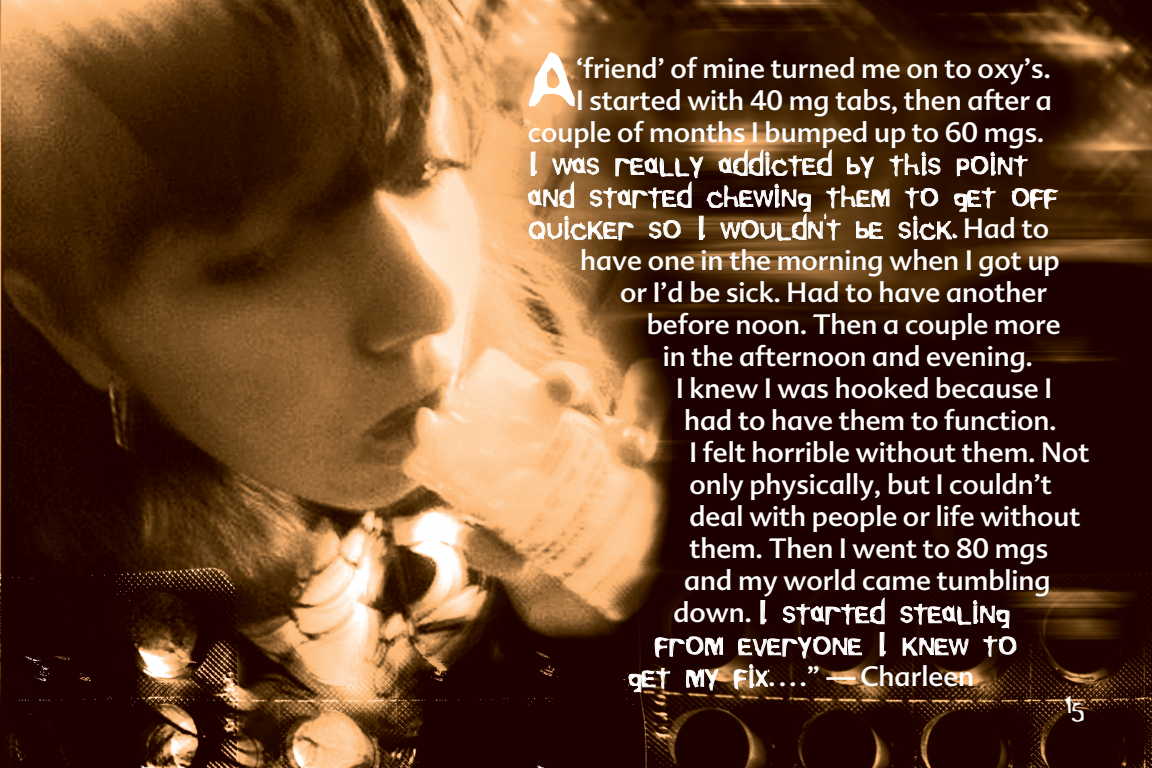
Short-term effects of opioids and morphine derivatives include:

- Drowsiness
- Slowed breathing
- Constipation
- Unconsciousness
- Nausea
- Coma

# OPIOIDS AND MORPHINE DERIVATIVES LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Continued use or abuse of opioids can result in physical dependence and addiction. The body adapts to the presence of the drug and withdrawal symptoms occur if use is reduced or stopped. These include restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, and cold flashes, with goose bumps (“cold turkey”). Tolerance can also occur, meaning that long-term users must increase their doses to achieve the same high.

For more information about the abuse of painkillers, see *The Truth About Painkillers* in this series of booklets.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a woman with dark hair drinking from a clear plastic bottle. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a hazy atmosphere. In the foreground, several blister packs containing white, round pills are visible, some of which are being held or manipulated. The woman's face is partially obscured by the bottle and the pills, focusing attention on the act of consumption and the presence of the medication.

A 'friend' of mine turned me on to oxy's. I started with 40 mg tabs, then after a couple of months I bumped up to 60 mgs. I was REALLY addicted by this point AND STARTED CHEWING THEM TO GET OFF QUICKER SO I WOULDN'T BE SICK. Had to have one in the morning when I got up or I'd be sick. Had to have another before noon. Then a couple more in the afternoon and evening. I knew I was hooked because I had to have them to function. I felt horrible without them. Not only physically, but I couldn't deal with people or life without them. Then I went to 80 mgs and my world came tumbling down. I STARTED STEALING FROM EVERYONE I KNEW TO GET MY FIX..." — Charleen

# STIMULANTS

Stimulants, sometimes called “uppers,” temporarily increase alertness and energy. The most commonly used street drugs that fall into this category are cocaine and amphetamines.

Prescription stimulants come in tablets or capsules. When abused, they are swallowed, injected in liquid form or crushed and snorted.

Some of the well-known brand and street names:

## BRAND NAMES

- Ritalin
- Concerta
- Biphphetamine
- Dexedrine

## STREET NAMES

- R-ball
- Skippy
- The smart drug
- Vitamin R
- JIF
- Kibbles and bits
- Speed
- Truck drivers
- Bennies
- Black beauties
- Crosses
- Hearts
- LA turnaround
- Uppers





## STIMULANTS SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

The short-term effects of stimulants include exhaustion, apathy and depression—the “down” that follows the “up.” It is this immediate and lasting exhaustion that quickly leads the stimulant user to want the drug again. Soon he is not trying to get “high,” he is only trying to get “well”—to feel any energy at all.

## STIMULANTS LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Stimulants can be addictive. Repeated high doses of some stimulants over a short period can lead to feelings of hostility or paranoia. Such doses may also result in dangerously high body temperatures and an irregular heartbeat.

For more information about the abuse of prescription stimulants, see *The Truth About Ritalin Abuse* in this series of booklets.

# ANTIDEPRESSANTS

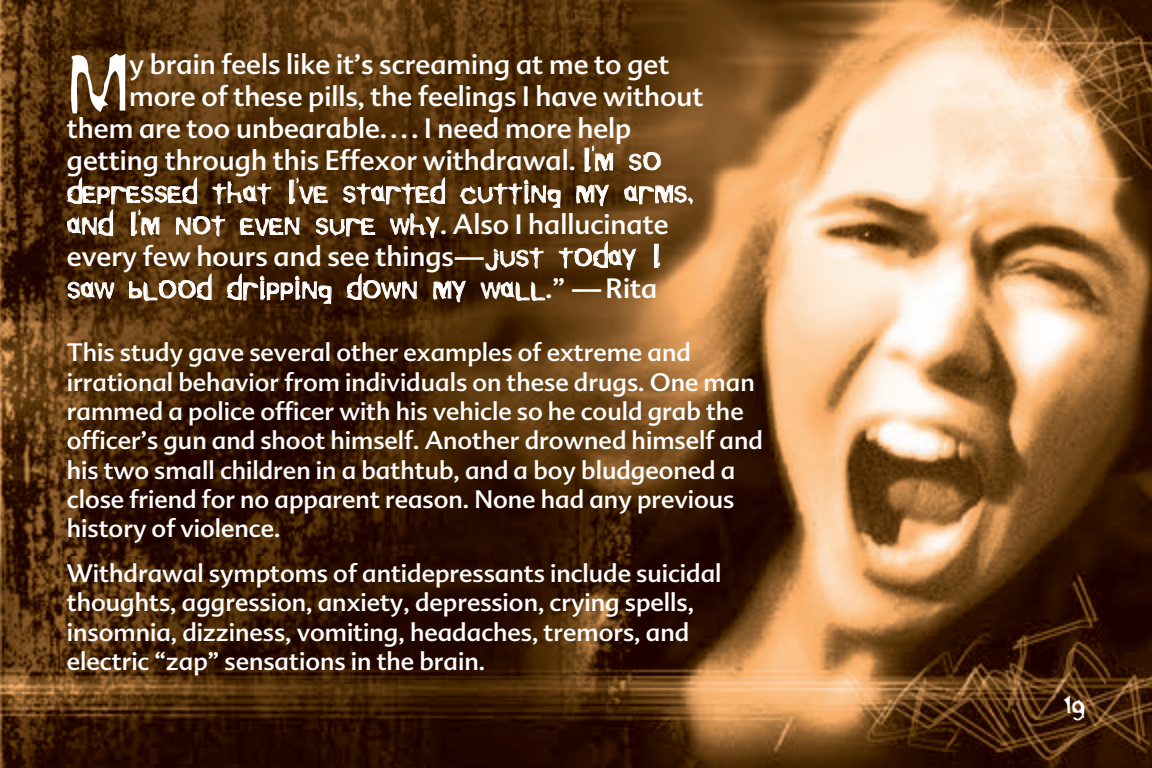
**A**nother category of prescription drugs that are sometimes abused are antidepressants. These include Prozac, Paxil, Celexa, Zoloft, Effexor and Remeron. These come in multicolored capsules and tablets.

Studies have shown that the effects of these drugs can include:

- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Nervousness and anxiety
- Violent thoughts and actions
- Agitation
- Suicidal thoughts or suicide
- Tremors
- Hostility

- Sweating
- Irregular heartbeat
- Aggression
- Criminal behavior
- Confusion and incoherent thoughts
- Paranoia
- Hallucinations
- Psychosis
- Akathisia (a painful inner agitation; inability to sit still)

One study found that 14% of the young people taking an antidepressant became aggressive and even violent. One 12-year-old boy developed violent nightmares about killing his classmates, then being shot himself. The dream continued to feel “very real” after awakening, and for days he experienced dreams of killing that seemed increasingly real. He became acutely suicidal until the drug was stopped.



My brain feels like it's screaming at me to get more of these pills, the feelings I have without them are too unbearable.... I need more help getting through this Effexor withdrawal. I'M SO DEPRESSED THAT I'VE STARTED CUTTING MY ARMS, AND I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHY. Also I hallucinate every few hours and see things—JUST TODAY I SAW BLOOD DRIPPING DOWN MY WALL.” —Rita

This study gave several other examples of extreme and irrational behavior from individuals on these drugs. One man rammed a police officer with his vehicle so he could grab the officer's gun and shoot himself. Another drowned himself and his two small children in a bathtub, and a boy bludgeoned a close friend for no apparent reason. None had any previous history of violence.

Withdrawal symptoms of antidepressants include suicidal thoughts, aggression, anxiety, depression, crying spells, insomnia, dizziness, vomiting, headaches, tremors, and electric “zap” sensations in the brain.

# KETAMINE

**K**etamine, categorized as a “dissociative anesthetic,”\* is used in powdered or liquid form as an anesthetic, usually on animals. It can be injected, consumed in drinks, snorted, or added to joints or cigarettes. Ketamine was placed on the list of controlled substances in the US in 1999.

Short- and long-term effects include increased heart rate and blood pressure, nausea, vomiting, numbness, depression, amnesia, hallucinations and potentially fatal respiratory problems. Ketamine users can also develop cravings for the drug. At high doses, users experience an effect referred to as “K-Hole,” an “out of body” or “near-death” experience.

Due to the detached, dreamlike state it creates, where the user finds it difficult to move, ketamine has been used as a “date-rape” drug.

## BRAND NAMES

- Ketaset
- Ketalar
- Ketalar SV
- Ketanest
- Ketanest S

## STREET NAMES

- Special K
- K
- super C
- cat Valium
- jet
- super acid
- green

\* dissociative anesthetic: a drug that distorts perception of sight and sound and produces feelings of detachment (dissociation) from the environment and self.

# ABUSE OF OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS

Over-the-counter cold and cough medicines containing the drug Dextromethorphan (DXM) have also been abused. DXM is sold in syrup, gel and tablet form. When sold on the Internet as powder, it is particularly risky because of the uncertainty of its composition and dose. It is found in more than 100 products; Coricidin and Robitussin are abused the most.

## BRAND NAMES

- Coricidin
- Robitussin

## STREET NAMES

- DXM
- CCC
- Triple C
- Skittles
- Robo
- Poor Man's PCP



## COUGH SYRUP (DXM) EFFECTS

- Visual hallucinations
- Hyper-excitability
- Insomnia
- Lethargy
- Physical dependence (with prolonged use)
- Dizziness
- Slurred speech
- Delusions
- Sweating
- High blood pressure
- Liver and brain damage

Mixed with other drugs, cough syrup can also cause central nervous system and heart problems. Combined with alcohol, it is particularly dangerous and can result in death.

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**M**y experience with DXM: I started peeing  
blood. I felt sick... My body felt weak...  
I gave up everything because I was obsessed  
with using... All I cared about was getting high... I  
thought I could just use Coricidin for fun, that it didn't  
matter. I never expected to get hooked... I'll never  
be able to get that time back. **IF I COULD ERASE IT  
AND MAKE IT GO AWAY, I WOULD.** —Crystal



# INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS

Every day in the US, 2,500 youth (12 to 17) abuse a prescription pain reliever for the first time.

Prescription drug abuse, while most prevalent in the US, is a problem in many areas around the world including Europe, Southern Africa and South Asia. In the US alone, more than 15 million people abuse prescription drugs, more than the combined number who reported abusing cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants and heroin.

In 2006 in the United States, 2.6 million people abused prescription drugs for the first time.

A 2007 survey in the US found that 3.3% of 12- to 17-year-olds and 6% of 17- to 25-year-olds had abused prescription drugs in the past month.

Prescription drug abuse causes the largest percentage of deaths from drug overdosing. Of the 22,400 drug overdose deaths in the US in 2005, opioid painkillers were the most commonly found drug, accounting for 38.2% of these deaths.



# CAUSE OF DEATHS

Prescription  
Drugs

45%

STREET  
Drugs  
COMBINED

39%

+

AMPHETAMINE

+

METHAMPHETAMINE

+

HEROIN

+

COCAINE

In 2005, 4.4 million teenagers (aged 12 to 17) in the US admitted to taking prescription painkillers, and 2.3 million took a prescription stimulant such as Ritalin. 2.2 million abused over-the-counter drugs such as cough syrup. The average age for first-time users is now 13 to 14.



**Depressants, opioids and antidepressants are responsible for more overdose deaths (45%) than cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and amphetamines (39%) combined. In the United States, the most deaths used to take place in inner cities in African-American neighborhoods, but they have now been overtaken by white rural communities. The same trend can be seen in the rates of hospitalization for substance abuse and emergency hospitalization for overdoses. Of the 1.4 million drug-related emergency**

**room admissions in 2005, 598,542 were associated with abuse of pharmaceuticals alone or with other drugs.**

**By survey, almost 50% of teens believe that prescription drugs are much safer than illegal street drugs—60% to 70% say that home medicine cabinets are their source of drugs.**

**According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, teens who abuse prescription drugs are twice as likely to use alcohol,**

five times more likely to use marijuana, and twelve to twenty times more likely to use illegal street drugs such as heroin, Ecstasy and cocaine than teens who do not abuse prescription drugs.

In 2007, the Drug Enforcement Administration found that abuse of the painkiller Fentanyl killed more than 1,000 people that year in the US. It is 30 to 50 times more powerful than heroin.

I realized I was using more Xanax on a regular basis. I took time off work to get off it. WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE I was addicted, I went 'cold turkey.' For four days and nights I was bedridden. I didn't sleep or eat. I vomited. I had hallucinations. On about the third day without Xanax I started to become uncoordinated and unbalanced and bumped into things. On about the fourth day I became really worried when I started having twitching sensations."

— Patricia

# The Truth About Drugs

**D**rugs are essentially poisons. The amount taken determines the effect. A small amount acts as a stimulant (speeds you up). A greater amount acts as a sedative (slows you down). An even larger amount poisons and can kill.

This is true of any drug. Only the amount needed to achieve the effect differs.

But many drugs have another liability: they directly affect the mind. They can distort the user's perception of what is happening around him or her. As a result, the person's actions may be odd, irrational, inappropriate and even destructive.

Drugs block off all sensations, the desirable ones with the unwanted. So, while providing short-term help in the relief of pain, they also wipe out ability and alertness and muddy one's thinking.

Medicines are drugs that are intended to speed up or slow down or change something about the way your body is working, to try to make it work better. Sometimes they are necessary. But they are still drugs: they act as stimulants or sedatives, and too much can kill you. So if you do not use medicines as they are supposed to be used, they can be as dangerous as illegal drugs.

**The real answer is to get the facts and not to take drugs in the first place.**



## WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

People take drugs because they want to change something in their lives.

Here are some of the reasons young people have given for taking drugs:

- To fit in
- To escape or relax
- To relieve boredom
- To seem grown up
- To rebel
- To experiment

They think drugs are a solution. But eventually, the drugs become the problem.

Difficult as it may be to face one's problems, the consequences of drug use are always worse than the problem one is trying to solve with them. The real answer is to get the facts and not to take drugs in the first place.



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### PHOTO CREDITS:

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Millions of copies of booklets such as this have been distributed to people around the world in 22 languages. As new drugs appear on the streets and more information about their effects becomes known, existing booklets are updated and new ones created.

The booklets are published by the Foundation for a Drug-Free World, a nonprofit public benefit organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

The Foundation provides educational materials, advice and coordination for its international drug prevention network. It works with youth, parents, educators, volunteer organizations and government agencies—anyone with an interest in helping people lead lives free from drug abuse.

# FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

This booklet is one in a series of publications that cover the facts about marijuana, alcohol, Ecstasy, cocaine, crack cocaine, crystal meth and methamphetamine, inhalants, heroin, LSD and prescription drug abuse. Armed with this information, the reader can make the decision to live a drug-free life.



**For more information or to obtain more copies of this or other booklets in this series, contact:**

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