

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ...

Kids & Prescription/ Over-the-Counter Drugs



Over-the-counter drugs are found in nearly everyone's medicine cabinet. And kids can buy many of these in stores and online without a prescription. When they are taken according to directions, they can ease a headache, stop the sniffles or help someone sleep.

Prescription drugs treat pain and other health problems. Some—like Ritalin—help some children control their behavior so they can focus in school. Others, like drugs containing codeine, relieve pain. When prescription drugs are taken according to doctor's directions, they can help make children healthy and able to do well in school.

Yet if these drugs aren't used properly, they can be dangerous. Some can be addictive. Here are some facts you need to know about kids and prescription or over-the-counter drugs.



Which drugs are children most likely to misuse?

Both prescription and over-the-counter drugs are often misused.

- **Prescription drugs** that children most often misuse include OxyContin and Vicodin.
- **Over-the-counter drugs** often misused include cold medicines, diet pills and pain killers.

Many prescription and over-the-counter drugs come in pill, liquid, capsule, spray and inhaler form.

Street names for the drugs include speed, downers, uppers and bennies.

How do prescription and over-the-counter drugs affect the mind and body?

Most of the drugs that children abuse are depressants or stimulants.

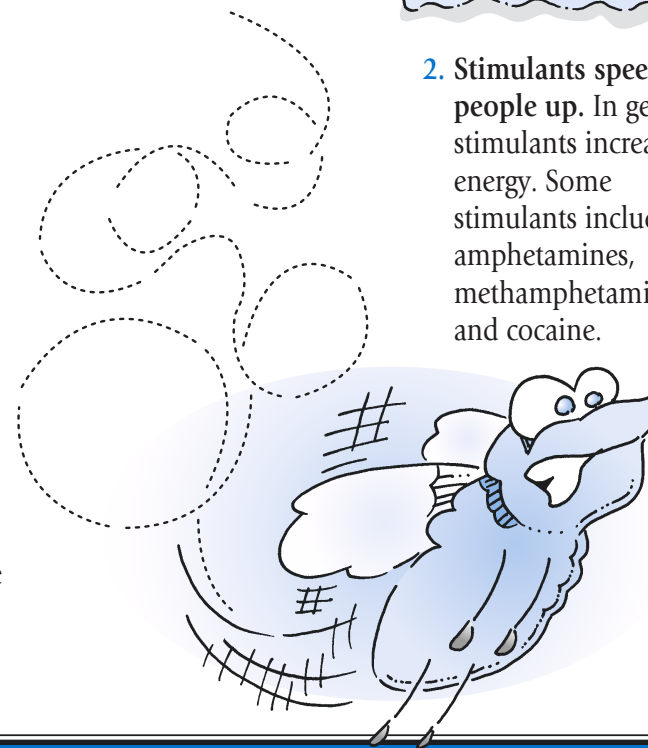
1. Depressants (tranquilizers and sedatives) slow people down.

In general depressants reduce anxiety, tensions and sleep disorders.

Examples of depressants include anesthetics, barbiturates, alcohol and PCP (Phencyclidine).



2. Stimulants speed people up. In general, stimulants increase energy. Some stimulants include amphetamines, methamphetamines and cocaine.



What happens if these drugs are abused?

It depends on how much of the drug is taken, how often it's taken and how it is taken.

If abused, depressants can:

- Cause a person to feel tired.
- Interfere with the ability to concentrate.
- Cause convulsions and seizures.
- Cause respiratory problems, even failure.



If abused, stimulants can:

- Cause nervousness.
- Cause severe weight loss.
- Prevent sleep.
- Make a person feel angry, frightened, even suicidal.
- Create paranoia—the feeling that everyone is against you.
- Cause hallucinations—seeing things that don't exist.
- Increase heart rate.
- Make the body shake all over.



With continued use, the body can develop a tolerance to these drugs.

Then more of the drug is needed to get high. It is also possible to become addicted to either depressants or stimulants.



What is 'Pharming'?

Pharming" (from the word pharmaceuticals) is a slang term for using medicine to get high. Teenagers (and even preteens) will raid medicine cabinets or get prescription drugs on the Internet—many sites sell them with no questions asked. And often teens say they get prescription drugs from a friend or relative for free.

According to a recent study:

- 1 in 5 teens has intentionally abused prescription pain medications.
- 1 in 10 has abused prescription stimulants including cough medicine with the active ingredient dextromethorphan (DXM).
- 1 in 3 teens has been offered medicine for the purpose of getting high.

Why aren't teens concerned about pharming?

Because they think that prescription drugs are safe. So take time to talk with your child. According to The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, "... kids who report learning a lot about the risks of abuse from their parents are up to 50% less likely to use drugs as those who don't."

What can you do?

- **Be a good role model.** Make sure you use both prescription and over-the-counter drugs according to the doctor's orders or the package directions.
- **Teach your children to use drugs safely.** Do not allow your child to give or receive any drug.
- **Learn and follow the school's rules** if your child must take a prescription or over-the-counter drug at school. The rules are designed for your child's safety. For example, the school may ask that you send medicine in its original bottle. This protects your child in case of an emergency.
- **Watch television with your child.** Discuss how over-the-counter and prescription drugs are portrayed. (Does someone take pills for instant relief? Do they take pills when they are sad?)
- **Keep communication open.** Say often that your child is special, loved and irreplaceable.



Parent awareness of the easy availability and the dangers of prescription and over-the-counter drugs is the first step in helping to protect children. And parents who *know the dangers* of drugs and *talk with their children* about them can help their children avoid drug abuse. That's why parents are called the Anti-Drug.

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

One of a series of *QuickTips*® from The Parent Institute®,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
(800) 756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com
Stock No. 1152 (English) • Stock No. 2152 (Spanish)
Copyright © 2020 The Parent Institute®