

The 5 Most Abused Prescription Drugs In The U.S.

There's an epidemic in America right now and not much of a desire for its reversal.



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The average American who is prescribed medication has more enemies than allies. Pharmaceutical companies are cashing in on addiction and few politicians and officials are trying to stop greed and preventable death from overdose. Prescription drugs are [killing](#) 44 people every day and show no signs of declining. Prescription drug overdose is the top cause of accidental death in the United States; because [60 percent](#) of Americans are prescribed at least one drug, changing this is nearly impossible.

Opioids like OxyContin are a driving force in this epidemic leading to 19,000 of the 47,000 annual [deaths](#) related to prescription drug overdose in 2014, according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine's most recent data. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) is one of the drug-takers' few allies. She recently [sent](#) a letter to the head of the Center for Disease Control calling for the government to consider legal marijuana as an alternative painkiller.

Senator Elizabeth Warren thinks weed could be an alternative to highly addictive painkillers

<https://t.co/lamie0S1CP>

-- NowThis (@nowthisnews) [February 17, 2016](#)

Ten years ago, this proposal would have been deemed ridiculous. But there's [proof](#) that marijuana usage is a legitimate alternative, which could potentially reverse sky-high overdose death rates in the U.S. In 2014, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published an article saying that "states with medical marijuana laws had a 24.8 percent lower average annual opioid overdose death rate compared to states without such laws." But those debates will take place in the future; let's take a second to focus on the past and how it impacts today's alarming rates of prescription abuse.

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What are the most abused prescription drugs?

1. OxyContin

The Sackler family, which owns Purdue Pharma, turned the most lethal and heavily prescribed painkiller into a controversial drug. This has earned them a net worth of \$14 billion and a spot on the [Forbes](#) 2015 list of richest families in the U.S.

2. Suboxone

Thanks to the free market system, a highly successful and profitable pill like OxyContin is so addictive, the second most abused prescription drug in the U.S. is the one prescribed to treat addiction to opioids like OxyContin. The company Reckitt Benckiser spent their early years lobbying the U.S. government to enact the Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2002 and [worked closely](#) with the National Institute on Drug Abuse and FDA to lay the groundwork for their product which established a company now worth around \$12.5 trillion. Coincidence? You tell me.

Business Insider

3. Concerta

When Concerta was being studied for FDA approval, there were [accusations](#) that one of the doctors was lobbied to inaccurately report that there were no side effects to using the drug in 2004. In 2009, Concerta ran this high-profile ad claiming the drug will help kids get on a path to success. Six years later, the *New York Times* [raised](#) alarming questions and suggested that the national spikes in diagnoses were caused by effective marketing and advertisements. ADHD medication prescriptions have [increased](#) more than 600 percent since 1990.

4. Ambien

Millions of people have been sleeping like a baby since this drug emerged in 1993. Fun fact: The two biggest high-profile cases around the drug's ability to impair drivers were thanks to two Kennedys crashing their cars. Robert F. Kennedy's daughter Kerry said the drug turned her into a "[zombie](#)," but she was eventually found not guilty of driving under the influence in 2014. In 2006, the son of John F. Kennedy's brother, Rep. Patrick Kennedy, also [crashed](#) his car after popping Ambien.

In 2013, the FDA [demanded](#) that doctors lower their dosage to women because there were too many reports of women feeling drowsy the next morning and an increase in car accidents. Despite these demands and the incidents involving the Kennedys, the drug's parent company, Sanofi, has been raking in around \$36 billion in annual revenue with minimal distractions.

Business Insider

This ad from 1957 misrepresenting the effects of Ritalin.

5. Ritalin/Focalin (methylphenidate)

The U.S. [accounts](#) for more the 80 percent of global consumption of methylphenidate which is sold as Ritalin. In 2013, the *New York Times* [reported](#) that the "sales of stimulants to treat ADHD have more than doubled to \$9 billion in 2012 from \$4 billion in 2007, according to the health care information company IMS Health." When pharmaceutical companies, doctors, psychiatrists, and the FDA all believe that one in five high school boys have ADHD, it should be no surprise that profits are in the billions.

Business Insider

This ad successfully targeted dysfunctional children's parents into considering Adderall.

In one of the most underrated marketing accomplishments of all time, advertisements literally convinced millions of American families to look into ADHD and prescription drugs. Remember the Seckler family that owns Purdue Pharma and has a net worth of \$14 billion? That same family-owned business [settled](#) complaints that they encouraged physicians to **overprescribe** OxyContin. Paying \$19.5 million in settlements can't stop greed. It's unclear how many preventable deaths are to blame for the absurd levels at which American doctors have prescribed these five drugs. There are dozens of others being abused that have not been mentioned here, but American prescription drug consumers need more allies than enemies. For now, that's just a pipe dream.



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