



# The Truth about 'Study Drugs'



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## Student Wellness Centre

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# What are 'Study Drugs'?

Study drugs are medications that are prescribed traditionally for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), such as Vyvanse, Concerta, Adderall, but are increasingly misused in a nonmedical capacity by students. Study Drugs are central nervous system (CNS) stimulants, which means they stimulate the brain to speed up mental and physical processes.



There is no research to support that study drugs enhance learning or thinking ability when taken by people who do not actually have ADHD.

## How Do CNS Stimulants Work?

CNS stimulants increase activity of brain chemicals dopamine and norepinephrine.

### **Dopamine:**

- Plays a role in movement control, attention, learning, and emotional responses
- Is naturally produced in the body

### **Norepinephrine:**

- Changes blood flow, heart rate, and breathing
- Is naturally produced in the body when 'fight or flight' response is triggered

## **Why is a CNS Stimulant Prescribed?**

Individuals who have ADHD are prescribed CNS stimulants to balance levels of brain chemicals, dopamine and norepinephrine. A doctor will start prescribing a small amount and then slowly increase the amount until the desired effect is reached, similar to how the body produces those chemicals naturally.

## **Types/Brands of CNS Stimulants**

- **Vyvanse**
- **Adderall**
- **Dexedrine**
- **Ritalin/ Bipentin/ Concerta**

# Short-term Side Effects of CNS Stimulants

CNS stimulants are medications, therefore if you use them, whether you have a prescription or not, you may experience some of these side effects:

- Increase in blood pressure
- Increase in heart rate
- Increase in body temperature
- Nausea & vomiting
- Insomnia (trouble falling asleep)
- Suppressed appetite

You should consider not taking CNS stimulants if you or someone in your family has a history of mental health concerns. Substance use can trigger or worsen symptoms. Avoid use of substances to cope with mental health concerns and talk to a health professional before use.

## Safer use: Stimulants Side Effects

**If you choose to use study drugs without a prescription, here are some strategies to reduce unwanted side effects:**

1. Know what drug you're taking.
2. Use with a trusted sober person nearby.
3. Start slow, use smaller doses and practice caution when using drugs that have not been prescribed to you by a licensed healthcare provider.
4. Make time to eat and stay hydrated while using.
5. Schedule time to sleep and recover after use.

# Overdoses

## **Know the signs of a stimulant overdose**

- Weakness, shaking, heart rhythm disturbances, nausea, aggression, confusions, seizures

## **What to do when someone is overdosing on stimulants**

- Call 911 immediately
- Stay with the individual and encourage them to drink water and stay as calm as possible
- If they are having a seizure, make sure there is nothing around that can hurt them
- Help them cool down with wet cloths

# Know the Law

CNS stimulants are controlled substances, which means you need a prescription to buy them from a pharmacy.

- It is illegal to use or buy CNS stimulants without a prescription
- It is illegal to sell or give away CNS stimulants
- Most CNS stimulants are banned from university sport & will result in a positive drug test



# Addiction and Dependency

CNS stimulant have the potential to be addictive. Substance use disorder may be characterized by the 3 C's of Addiction:

1. Loss of **C**ontrol
2. **C**ompulsion to use
3. Use despite the negative **C**onsequences

If you feel like you or someone you know is experiencing Substance dependency reach out to your health professional or the resources below.

## Alternatives to Study Drugs

If you need to focus and get schoolwork done, there are better choices than study drugs. Here are

some proven ways to boost concentration and beat stress:

- A good night's sleep. Getting enough rest at night improves memory and will help you focus, learn, and think clearly. Teens need about 9 hours of sleep at night.
- Exercise. Get energized the natural way by moving your body. Play sports, go for a gym workout or run, try yoga or take a walk. Exercise boosts learning, memory, and concentration. Regular exercise also improves mood, helps people sleep, and reduces stress.
- Eating right. Good nutrition is key to a healthy body and mind. Don't skip meals and choose a variety of healthy foods (like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean protein) to fuel the brain and help keep energy levels high.
- Meditation. Meditating before tackling a big study session can clear the mind and help you focus on the task at hand. Even a few minutes of meditation a day can lower stress.

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# Additional Resources

## **Saskatchewan Health Authority**

Anyone can refer individuals to community services. If you feel like you need help, call Adult Mental Health Services Centralized Intake: (306) 655-7777

## **On Campus**

### **Student Affairs and Outreach**

- A team of social workers to provide social supports

### **Student Wellness Centre**

- A medical and counselling team to help diagnose and treat medical and mental health concerns

### **Access and Equity Services**

- A support for students needing accommodations

## **Be Intentional**

Reflect on the reasons you may want to use study drugs. Think through the experiences you do and don't want to have while taking drugs like Adderall or Ritalin. Here are a couple examples:

- **If I choose to use study drugs, I want to...**
  - have more energy and focus
  - meet a tight deadline or pull an



all-nighter

- experience effects not related to studying (e.g. euphoria, relief, etc.)

- want to work faster or feel more productive

- **If I choose to use study drugs, I don't want to...**

- feel anxious, jittery or experience other mental health impacts

- experience physical symptoms (e.g. nausea, digestive issues, etc.)

- lose sleep

- lose my appetite

- focus on the wrong thing (e.g. organizing your room instead of studying)

As you think through the experiences you may want to have or avoid, consider if there are other ways to achieve the same results while avoiding unwanted experiences.

## References

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