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Prescription Drug Misuse

Also called: Prescription Drug Abuse

What is prescription drug misuse?

If you take a medicine in a different way than your health care provider prescribed, it's called prescription drug misuse. It could be:

- Taking medicine prescribed for someone else.
- Taking a larger dose than you are supposed to.
- Taking the medicine in a different way than you are supposed to. For example, instead of swallowing your tablets, you might crush them and then snort or inject them.
- Using the medicine for another purpose, such as getting high.

Misusing some prescription drugs can lead to addiction [<https://medlineplus.gov/druguseandaddiction.html>]. These include opioids [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopiodusedisorderoud.html>], sedatives, tranquilizers, and stimulants. Drug addiction is a chronic brain disease. It causes a person to take drugs repeatedly despite the harm they cause.

Who is at risk for prescription drug misuse?

Prescription drug misuse can affect anyone at any age, including teenagers and older adults. It can happen if you need certain medicines to treat a medical condition, reduce pain after an injury or surgery, or for chronic pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicpain.html>].

Risk factors can include:

- A lack of knowledge about the prescription drug and possible risks
- A previous addiction to other substances, including alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcoholusedisorderaud.html>] and tobacco [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>]
- Certain mental health conditions

What are the risks of prescription drug misuse?

Prescription drug misuse can have serious medical consequences. Every medicine has some risk of side effects, which providers think about when prescribing medicines. People who misuse these drugs may not know the risks. Some medicines may not be safe for them, especially at higher doses or when taken with other medicines.

What are treatments for prescription drug misuse?

Treatment for prescription drug misuse often includes medicines and counseling, but it depends on the type of drug and your needs.

The counseling may be individual, family, and/or group therapy. It can help you:

- Understand why prescription drug misuse began
- Learn how to change unhealthy patterns of thinking and behavior

- Manage personal problems and develop positive relationships
- Learn how to manage cravings and avoid situations that could lead to a relapse

Stopping or cutting back on prescription drugs used for a while, may cause different symptoms for different drugs. This is called withdrawal. Your provider will work with you to manage the symptoms as your body gets used to being taken off the medicine.

How can I prevent problems with taking prescription drugs?

Providers and pharmacists play a role in preventing or reducing prescription drug misuse, but you can also take steps to reduce your risk.

A few ways to help reduce your risk and make sure that you are using any prescription medicines correctly include:

- Talk to your provider about any other prescription medicines, over-the-counter-medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/overthecountermedicines.html>] , and supplements that you're taking to see if it is safe to take the prescription drug with them.
- Follow the directions carefully and take medicine as prescribed. If you're taking prescription drugs for pain and it isn't working, don't stop or change the amount you're taking without talking to your provider.
- If your provider prescribes opioids, ask about the risks and benefits of taking the medicine, and if another medicine with less risk of addiction could be used.

NIH: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Start Here

- Misuse of Prescription Drugs Research Report [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/overview>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/los-medicamentos-de-prescripcion-abuso-y-adiccion/panorama-general>]
- Prescription Drug Abuse [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prescription-drug-abuse/symptoms-causes/syc-20376813?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/prescription-drug-abuse/symptoms-causes/syc-20376813?p=1>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- Drug Testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/drug-testing/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-drogas/>]
- Drug Testing [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/drug-testing>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
- Mental Health Screening [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/mental-health-screening/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/evaluacion-de-salud-mental/>]
- Opioid Testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/opioid-testing/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-opiaceos/>]

Prevention and Risk Factors

- How Can Prescription Drug Misuse Be Prevented? [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/how-can-prescription-drug-misuse-be-prevented>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Treatments and Therapies

- How Can Prescription Drug Addiction Be Treated? [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/how-can-prescription-drug-addiction-be-treated>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/los-medicamentos-de-prescripcion-abuso-y-adiccion/como-se-puede-tratar-la-adiccion-los-medicamentos-recetados>]

Specifics

- Anabolic Steroids: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/anabolicsteroids.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/anabolicsteroids.html>]
- Benzodiazepines [<https://www.dea.gov/factsheets/benzodiazepines>] (Drug Enforcement Administration)

Statistics and Research

- Prescription Stimulant Misuse and Prevention Among Youth and Young Adults [<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep21-06-01-003.pdf>]
(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) - **PDF**
- What Is the Scope of Prescription Drug Misuse in the United States? [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/what-scope-prescription-drug-misuse>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/los-medicamentos-de-prescripcion-abuso-y-adiccion/cual-es-el-alcance-del-uso-indebido-de-los-medicamentos-recetados>]
- Which Classes of Prescription Drugs Are Commonly Misused? [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/what-classes-prescription-drugs-are-commonly-misused>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/los-medicamentos-de-prescripcion-abuso-y-adiccion/que-tipos-de-medicamentos-recetados-se-usan-comunmente-en-forma-indebida>]

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Methadone Prescribing Patterns at a Single Institution: A Retrospective Study and... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40630968>]
- Article: Medicaid Unwinding and Changes in Buprenorphine Dispensing. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40314954>]
- Article: Clinical pharmacist practitioners prescribing of buprenorphine for opioid use disorder. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40228325>]
- Prescription Drug Misuse -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Prescription+Drug+Overuse%22%5Bmajr%5D+OR+%22Drug+Prescriptions%22%5Bmajr%5D+AND+%22Substance-Related+Disorders%22%5Bmajr%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+2+Years%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29>]

Find an Expert

- Drug Enforcement Administration [<https://www.dea.gov/>]
- FindTreatment.gov [<https://findtreatment.gov/>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://findtreatment.gov/es>]
- Food and Drug Administration [<https://www.fda.gov/>]
- National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://nida.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es>]
- Partnership to End Addiction [<https://drugfree.org/>]

Teenagers

- Mind Matters: The Body's Response to Prescriptionation Stimulants [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators/mind-matter-series/prescription-stimulants>] (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/research-topics/parents-educators/mind-matter-series/estimulantes-recetados>]
- Prescriptionation Drug Abuse [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/prescription-drug-abuse.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/prescription-drug-abuse.html>]

- What Are Depressants? (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/drugs-depressants.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/drugs-depressants.html>]

Patient Handouts

- Substance use -- prescription drugs [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000798.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000798.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Barbiturate intoxication and overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000951.htm>]

Substance use -- prescription drugs [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000798.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Anabolic Steroids [<https://medlineplus.gov/anabolicsteroids.html>]

Medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/medicines.html>]

Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Prescription Drug Misuse* is the National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/prescriptiondrugmisuse.html>] on *Prescription Drug Misuse*

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