Prescription Drug Abuse Is a Dangerous Risk: Understand Why

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Prescription Drug Addiction – An Easily Overlooked Crisis

Many prescription medications, especially pain killers (opioids), can become addictive. On the surface, these prescription medications seem safe because they are frequently prescribed by your doctor. However, they present huge risks to a person's mental and physical health due to issues with abuse, addiction and dependence. Prescription drug addiction can become a problem, just like other drug addictions. Not everyone who receives a prescription for these medications will experience negative effects, but due to the perceived safety of these drugs, people may slide into the grips of prescription drug addiction without any awareness.

10 Uncommon Signs of Opioid and Prescription Drug Addiction

1. **Frequent flu-like symptoms.** Chronic nausea, sweating or chills can mimic flu symptoms but may indicate withdrawal.
2. **Excessive itching or scratching**. Opioids can cause histamine release, leading to persistent itching without an obvious rash.
3. **Unusual financial choices**. Selling personal items, frequent pawnshop visits or sudden financial distress without explanation.
4. **Worsening dental issues**. Opioids can lead to dry mouth, increasing the risk of cavities and gum disease.
5. **Social overcompensation**. Being excessively talkative, making elaborate excuses or being overly helpful to deflect suspicion.
6. **Mismatched emotions**. Laughing at inappropriate times, extreme mood swings or responding to situations with unusual emotional intensity.
7. **Odd sleeping positions**. Falling asleep in strange postures, such as sitting upright or mid-conversation, due to drowsiness.
8. **Constant pupil changes**. Pinpoint pupils even in dim light or dilated pupils at unusual times.
9. **Multiple doctor appointments**. Frequent visits to different doctors for vague or shifting symptoms, often resulting in new prescriptions.
10. **Paranoia or secretive behavior**. Unexplained nervousness, sudden privacy obsession or hiding pill bottles in unexpected places.

Prescription Drug Abuse – What Substances Carry an Addiction Risk?

Of course, not all drugs present a risk of addiction, but many do, even ones that a person may not suspect. Prescriptions drugs that are commonly abused belong to three groups:

Opioids

This medication is prescribed to reduce pain. Opioids have received a lot of attention over the recent years due to their addictive potential and harms of overuse. Opioids may have generic names like hydrocodone, codeine,

fentanyl and oxycodone, with brand names like OxyContin, Percocet and Vicodin. About 2 million people in the U.S. abused opioids for the first time in 2017.

Central Nervous System Depressants

These CNS depressants are a group of drugs that all work to slow down messages in the brain to create a feeling of calm and relaxation. Benzodiazepines comprise a major segment of this group with drugs like alprazolam (Xanax), clonazepam (Klonopin), diazepam (Valium) and lorazepam (Ativan). About 1.8 million people in the U.S. misused CNS depressants for the first time in 2017.

Stimulants

Normally prescribed to address ADHD symptoms, stimulants excite and speed up brain functioning. Common examples include dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine), dextroamphetamine/amphetamine combination product (Adderall) and methylphenidate (Ritalin, Concerta). About 1 million people in the U.S. misused stimulants for the first time in 2017.

How Can Prescription Medications Be Abused?

Each day, millions of people effectively use these medications to address their health conditions, but others will abuse the drugs. People can abuse prescription medications by:

- Taking more of the drug than prescribed, either by using more often or by increasing the dose
- Changing the route of administration like crushing and snorting a pill, rather than swallowing it
- Taking a medication that was not prescribed for them
- Mixing the medication with alcohol or other drugs with the intention of changing the effects

People may begin abusing their medications without fully realizing the consequences.

Abuse, Addiction and Dependence – What's the Difference?

With prescription drug abuse, the terms abuse, addiction and dependence may seem interchangeable, but they are quite different. As mentioned, abuse occurs anytime a person is not using the drug as intended.

Understanding Addiction

Addiction, frequently connected to abuse, is a psychological process that affects the person's thoughts and behaviors. A person addicted to a prescription pain medication may begin to obsessively think about ways to get and use the medication. Their behaviors will follow with increased time spent attempting to obtain and use more of the drug.

A person addicted to a drug will attempt to get multiple prescriptions from different doctors or buy the medication on the street. They will sacrifice relationships, money, work, housing, health and stability as the drug becomes their only priority.

Understanding Dependence

Dependence, on the other hand, is a physiological process involving the brain's reaction to the availability of the drug in the system. When you start using a new drug, your brain has a powerful reaction to it, but over time, the reaction becomes smaller. This expected process called tolerance is seen with many substances, like caffeine and alcohol, where larger amounts are needed to have the same effect over time.

Physical dependence occurs when your brain needs the drug to feel well and function normally. If you take the medication away, your brain will create a group of withdrawal symptoms and cravings for the substance. Restarting the medication will end the withdrawal symptoms but restart the dependence process. A person can be

dependent on a drug without being addicted and they can be addicted without being dependent.

Best Ways to Avoid Prescription Drug Abuse

Prescription drug abuse is a complicated problem, as the signs will vary between people. To avoid the problems with drug abuse and misuse:

- Take the medication as direction by your prescriber. If you are tempted to misuse the medication, feel free to have on honest conversation with your doctor.
- Understand your medication. Not all prescription drugs are equal. Some have no addiction or abuse risk, while others will pose significant challenges. Ask plenty of questions about your substance.
- Keep treatment short-term. Most opioids and CNS depressants are intended for short-term use only. Using the medications consistently for long periods only increases the addiction and dependence risk.
- Never share your medication. Misusing your medication puts you at risk and sharing your medicines put others at risk. Very harmful outcomes, like overdose and death, may emerge after sharing your drugs with others.

Unfortunately, prescription drug addiction and abuse is not going away. The problem continues to worsen with time, so be sure to take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones.