

# Let's Work Together To Combat Prescription Drug Misuse

## What Is Prescription Drug Misuse?



Prescription drug misuse occurs when a person takes a medicine in a way that is different from what their doctor or other health care professional prescribed. An individual misuses prescription drugs when they:

- Take a medicine that is prescribed for someone else
- Take a larger dose than they are supposed to
- Take the medicine in a different way than they are supposed to (e.g., crushing tablets and then snorting or injecting them)
- Using the medicine for another purpose, such as getting high

The three classes of medication most commonly misused are:

- **Opioids**—Prescribed to treat pain and include hydrocodone (e.g., Vicodin®), oxycodone (e.g., OxyContin®, Percocet®), morphine (e.g., Kadian®, Avinza®), codeine, fentanyl, and others
- **Central nervous system (CNS) depressants**—Prescribed to treat anxiety and sleep disorders and include diazepam (Valium®), clonazepam (Klonopin®), alprazolam (Xanax®), zolpidem (Ambien®), eszopiclone (Lunesta®), mephobarbital (Mebaral®), phenobarbital (Luminal®), and pentobarbital sodium (Nembutal®)
- **Stimulants**—Prescribed to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and often include barbiturates such as mephobarbital (Mebaral®), phenobarbital (Luminal®), and pentobarbital sodium (Nembutal®)

Prescription drug misuse can have serious medical consequences, including emergency room visits; overdose deaths; and treatment admissions for prescription drug misuse disorders, the most severe form of which is an addiction. Overdose deaths involving prescription opioids were five times higher in 2016 than in 1999 (CDC 2018). **Naloxone** is a medication designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. It is an opioid antagonist—meaning that it binds to opioid receptors and can reverse and block the effects of other opioids. It can very quickly restore normal respiration to a person whose breathing has slowed or stopped as a result of overdosing with prescription opioid pain medications. Connecticut law allows trained and certified pharmacists to prescribe naloxone to anyone requesting it.

## Who Is Most At-Risk for Prescription Drug Misuse?

Misuse of prescription drugs is a serious health problem in the United States. In 2017, an estimated 18 million people (more than 6% of those aged 12 and older) misused prescription drugs at least once in the past year (SAMHSA, 2018). The reasons for the high prevalence of prescription drug misuse vary by age, gender, and other factors, but likely include ease of access. The number of prescriptions for some of these medications has increased dramatically since the early 1990s. Moreover, misinformation about the addictive properties of prescription opioids and the perception that prescription drugs are less harmful than illicit drugs are other possible contributors to the problem. Although misuse of prescription drugs affects many Americans, certain populations such as adolescents, young adults, and older adults may be at particular risk.



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- Adolescent And Young Adults**—Misuse of prescription drugs is highest among young adults ages 18 to 25, with 14.4% reporting non-medical use in the past year (MI: Institute for Social Research, 2017) . Among adolescents ages 12 to 17, 4.9% reported past-year non-medical use of prescription medications. When asked how they obtained prescription stimulants for non-medical use, around 60% of the teenagers and young adults surveyed said they either bought or received the drugs from a friend or relative.

Young people who misuse prescription medications are also more likely to report use of other drugs. Multiple studies have revealed associations between prescription drug misuse and higher rates of cigarette smoking; heavy episodic drinking; and marijuana, cocaine, and other illicit drug use among U.S. teens, young adults, and college students. In the case of prescription opioids, receiving a legitimate prescription for these drugs during adolescence is also associated with a greater risk of future opioid misuse, particularly in young people who have little to no history of drug use.

- Older Adults**—More than 80% of older adults (ages 57 to 85 years) use at least one prescription medication on a daily basis, with more than 50% taking more than five medications or supplements daily. This can potentially lead to health issues resulting from unintentionally using a prescription medication in a manner other than how it was prescribed, or from intentional non-medical use.

The high rates of multiple (comorbid) chronic illnesses in older populations, age-related changes in drug metabolism, and the potential for drug interactions make medication (and other substance) misuse more dangerous in older people than in younger populations. Further, a large percentage of older adults also use over-the-counter medicines and dietary and herbal supplements, which could compound any adverse health consequences resulting from non-medical use of prescription drugs.

### How Can Prescription Drug Misuse Be Prevented?

People can talk with their health care provider about ways to manage pain without prescription medication. Individuals can also take steps to ensure that they use prescription medications appropriately by:

- Following the directions as explained on the label or by the pharmacist
- Being aware of potential interactions with other drugs as well as alcohol
- Never stopping or changing a dosing regimen without first discussing it with the doctor
- Never using another person's prescription and never giving their prescription medications to others
- Storing prescription stimulants, sedatives, and opioids safely, out of reach of others (including children, family, friends, and visitors)

Additionally, individuals should properly discard their unused or expired medications by taking them to a drug drop box at a police department. A list of Connecticut police departments that have drug collection boxes can be found on the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection's website at [www.ct.gov/DCP](http://www.ct.gov/DCP).

### Is There Help Available For A Person Who Is Misusing Prescription Drugs?

Yes. An individual who is misusing prescription medication can talk with their doctor or other health care provider about their prescription drug misuse and determine the best course of treatment. Help is also available through Connecticut's 24/7 Access Line at 1-800-563-4086.

## Connecticut Resources

**CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**  
[www.ct.gov/DMHAS](http://www.ct.gov/DMHAS)

**Drugfree CT**  
[www.drugfreeCT.org](http://www.drugfreeCT.org)

**24/7 Access Line**  
 1.800.563.4086

## National Resources

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**  
[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

