

Selected Facts about Prescription Drug Abuse

- Teen prescription drug abuse is an emerging threat. New youth abusers of prescription drugs now outnumber new users of every illicit drug, except marijuana: More young people ages 12-17 abuse prescription drugs than they do cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined.^{1,3}
 - One in three teens reports having a close friend who abuses prescription pain relievers to get high.⁴
 - One in four has a close friend who abuses over-the-counter (OTC) cough medicine to get high.⁴
 - Nearly one in five teens has used a prescription medication that was not prescribed to them.⁴
 - In 2006, one in 10 kids between the ages of 12 to 17 had used illicit drugs in the past month, including 3.3% who had used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons.³
 - A third of all new abusers of prescription drugs in 2006 were 12- to 17-year olds.³
 - Prescription drugs are the drug of choice among 12- to 13-year olds.³
- The prescription drugs most commonly abused by teens are painkillers, prescribed to treat pain; depressants, such as sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs; and stimulants, mainly prescribed to treat ADHD.¹
- Most kids who abuse pain relievers obtained the drugs from a friend or relative for free, while about 10 percent took the pain relievers from a friend or relative without asking.³
- Many teens view abusing prescription and OTC drugs as safer than using street drugs.¹
 - Four out of 10 teens think that prescription medicines are much safer to abuse than illicit drugs, even if they are not prescribed by a doctor.⁷
 - More than one in four (27%) parents feels that prescription and OTC drugs are much safer to abuse than street drugs.⁸
- People age 65 and above comprise only 13% of the population, yet account for approximately one-third of all medications prescribed in the United States. Thus, the elderly also are at risk for prescription drug abuse.⁵

- Alcohol and prescription drug abuse may affect as many as 17% of older adults.⁹
- The sheer size of the baby boomer generation means that the size of potential prescription drug abuse problems among the elderly could grow.⁶

References

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