

Prescription Drugs Information Fact Sheet

Scientific Name:

There are a variety of pharmaceutical drugs containing chemicals that can lead to drug abuse and/or addiction. These drugs include ingredients like opioids, stimulants, and central nervous system depressants.

Other Common Names:

Prescription Drug Abuse, Prescription Drug Addiction

- Barbiturates (depressant) : barbs, phennies, reds, red birds, tooies, yellows
- Benzodiazepines (depressant): candy, downers, sleeping pills, tranks
- Codeine (opioid): Captain Cody, Cody, schoolboy
- Morphine (opioid): M, monkey, Miss Emma, white stuff
- Oxycodone (opioid): oxy, O.C., oxycotton, percs
- Hydrocodone (opioid): vike, Watson-387
- Amphetamines (stimulant): bennies, black beauties, speed, uppers, crosses, hearts, truck drivers
- Methylphenidate (stimulant): MPH, R-ball, skippy, the smart drug, vitamin R

Description:

Though illicit drugs get most of the attention in discussions of drug abuse and drug addiction, pharmaceutical drug overuse, intentional misuse, diversion, and addiction is a growing problem. The Public Health Association of Australia defines pharmaceutical drug misuse as the use of a legal drug that is inconsistent with the intended use or directions.

- Overuse (dependent patient)– drug is take at higher doses than prescribed or for a longer period of time than directed.
- Intentional misuse or non-medical use – drug is taken in large quantity for intoxication purposes.
- Diversion (drug seller) – prescribed drugs are diverted to the illegal drug market to be sold for a profit.



Pharmaceutical drugs commonly misused include analgesics (pain pills), steroids, and tranquillisers (sedatives). The most commonly misused classes of prescription drugs in Australia are benzodiazepines and opioid analgesics. The benzodiazepines are prescribed to relieve anxiety and to treat panic attacks and insomnia. Some sedatives contain barbiturates but benzodiazepines are more commonly used now. Both depress the central nervous system. Opioid analgesics are prescribed to treat pain and include chemicals like morphine, codeine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone. Amphetamines are also sold as stimulant prescription drugs, primarily to treat deficit hyperactivity disorder and narcolepsy.

There are also over-the-counter drugs that are abused or misused. For example, cold and cough medicines may contain intoxicating chemicals. For example, dextromethorphan is a drug that clears mucus, but too much of it can get a person high and cause hallucinations. Pseudoephedrine is found in over-the-counter drugs also. This is the same drug used to make methamphetamine.

The drugs are misused in various ways. A person overusing a drug may not be aware of the overuse and is not intentionally failing to follow doctor orders. However, there is a growing trend in which people purposely misuse the drug, resell the drugs on the street, or use the ingredients to make illicit drugs.

Source:

Prescriptions written by health professionals, over-the-counter sales

Forms:

Most pharmaceutical drugs are capsules, tablets, or syrups so they are swallowed. However, drugs with oxycodone are sometimes crushed and then snorted or injected.

Health Effects:

Pharmaceutical drugs can produce a variety of psychological and physical effects that are determined by the quantity and frequency of the drug used, and the physical characteristics of the drug user. Most of the drugs are addictive. When misused, they are often mixed with alcohol or other drugs which can enhance the effects.

- **Depressants (barbiturates, benzodiazepines, sleep medications):** drowsiness, feelings of well-being, reduced anxiety, poor concentration, dizziness, slurred speech, impaired coordination, lowered blood pressure, slowed breathing, possible respiratory distress, euphoria
- **Opioids (codeine, morphine, methadone, oxycodone, hydrocodone):** pain relief, euphoria, drowsiness, dizziness, confusion, dry mouth, sedation, sweating, itching, constipation, slowed or arrested breathing, lowered blood pressure and pulse, muscle relaxation
- **Stimulants (amphetamines, methylphenidate):** feeling of exhilaration, mental alertness, increased energy, increased metabolism and heart rate, higher blood pressure, weight loss, reduced appetite, seizures, insomnia, loss of coordination, rapid breathing, anxiousness, hallucinations (amphetamines), paranoia, panic, aggressiveness
- **Dextromethorphan (cough and cold remedies):** euphoria, slurred speech, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, nausea, dizziness, paranoia, distorted visual perceptions, impaired motor function

Detection Period:

Opiates and amphetamines can be detected with saliva drug tests. Amphetamines, benzodiazepines, and opiates can be detected through urine drug testing. The following detection times are averages, with actual detection depending on factors like the quantity and frequency of use and the person's size.

- Amphetamines: 1-2 days in urine; 1-2 days in saliva
- Variant amphetamines: 2-5 days in urine; 1-5 days in saliva
- Benzodiazepines: 1-6 weeks in urine; 1-10 days in saliva
- Opiates: 2-4 days in urine; 1-4 days in saliva

Legal Status:

The Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons categorises various drugs. Pharmaceutical drugs appear in several schedules.

- Schedule 2 – Pharmacy Medicine: drugs sold over-the-counter, like dextromethorphan
- Schedule 3 – Pharmacy Only Medicine: drugs only sold in pharmacies that require counselling by a pharmacist, like pseudoephedrine



- Schedule 4 – Prescription Only Medicines: drugs requiring a prescription written by a medical, dental or veterinary professional; includes benzodiazepines
- Schedule 8 – Controlled Drug: drugs requiring a prescription written by a physician or dentist and a government permit to prescribe; includes amphetamines, barbiturates, hydrocodone, methadone, morphine, oxycodone, and others

In Western Australia, the S4 prescriptions are valid for 12 months, and the S8 prescriptions are valid for 6 months.

Other Information:

Prescription drugs are misused by all age groups. Teenagers and young adults divert pharmaceuticals for their euphoric effects. Older adults have turned to pharmaceuticals when unable to buy illicit drugs or when dealing with chronic pain.