

Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#77 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

Prescription Drugs When Does Use Become Misuse?



• Available in Spanish and Chinese: call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health
• Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite nyc.gov/health
• 需要中文服務 - 可電 311 或造訪網址: nyc.gov/health



Prescription drugs are often misused.

- Misusing prescription drugs includes taking medications without a prescription or using medication in a way it was not prescribed.
- About 1 in 7 adults in New York City has misused prescription drugs.

Anybody can have a problem.

- Men and women of all ethnicities, income levels, social backgrounds and ages misuse prescription drugs.
- Teenagers, and even children, can develop prescription drug problems.

Prescription drugs, when misused, can be just as dangerous as illicit drugs.

Some can cause overdose or other severe reactions.

- Even though they are prescribed by doctors, prescription drugs are not always safe. They often have the same effects as illegal drugs.
- Some prescription drugs can cause seizures, organ damage, heart problems and hallucinations.



- Prescription drugs can also cause accidental overdose – especially when taken with alcohol or other drugs.
- Accidental overdose is the third leading cause of death among New Yorkers ages 25 to 34. In 2008, 22% of these deaths involved prescription drugs – more than ever before.

Some lead to dependence. These are especially risky:

- **Opioid painkillers** (such as Vicodin, Oxycontin, Codeine, Percocet and Demerol). These drugs are in the same class as heroin.
- **Anti-anxiety drugs and tranquilizers** (benzodiazepenes such as Valium, Xanax and Halcion). These also act as sedatives.
- **Sleeping aids and other sedatives** (such as Seroquel, Ambien, Seconal, Nembutol and Phenobarbital).
- **Drugs for ADHD** or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (such as Ritalin, Adderall and Concerta). These also act as stimulants.
- **Diet pills** and other stimulants (such as Dexedrine, Adipex and Zantrex).

Don't put yourself in danger.

Don't buy or share drugs that are not prescribed for you.

- Taking drugs without a prescription, or sharing prescriptions with someone else, can be dangerous. *It is also against the law.*
- Never buy prescription medicines from people who are not licensed pharmacists or from stores – including online stores – that are not authorized to sell them.
- You can't be sure what you're getting. The drug could be counterfeit, or mixed with other drugs or substances without you knowing it.



Don't take your medication in a way it was not prescribed.

- Don't use medicine prescribed for one condition for something else. For example, don't take Vicodin to get to sleep, or for depression. (If you are feeling depressed or anxious, talk to your doctor.)
- Never take more of any medicine than prescribed. If you think you need a higher dose, talk to your doctor. A different drug may work better for you.
- Don't change doses or stop taking medicine without talking to your doctor first.

Prevent overdose!

- The more prescription medicines you take, the easier it is to make a mistake. People who take several medications are more likely to have dangerous drug interactions, including overdose.
- Nearly all accidental drug overdose deaths in New York City involve more than one substance. Protect yourself! Never mix alcohol or another drug with any prescription medication.



People who misuse prescription drugs often suffer bad effects.

These include:

- **Craving.** A very strong urge to use.
- **Mixing drugs.** Using more than one substance at a time.
- **Tolerance.** Needing more and more of the drug to get the same effect.
- **Loss of control.** Difficulty stopping or cutting down even when drug use is causing health problems, money problems or legal problems.
- **Withdrawal.** Feeling sick when a drug is stopped.
- **Blackouts.** Forgetting all or part of what happens when using.
- **Preoccupation.** Thinking a lot about getting and using drugs. Neglecting family, friends, work or school.



Are You Misusing Prescription Drugs?

Have you ever...

1. Thought you were misusing prescription drugs?
2. Become annoyed when someone criticized your drug use?
3. Felt scared, bad or guilty about misusing prescription drugs?
4. Needed a wake-up dose to feel better in the morning?

YES to 1 or 2 questions = possible problem

YES to 3 or 4 questions = probable dependence



Help is available!

Drug problems can be treated.

- Talk to your doctor or a substance-abuse counselor. Ask for help to quit.
- Be honest about which drugs you use, how much, and how often – as well as problems that drug use is causing.
- Don't stop taking drugs completely before talking with your doctor. Withdrawal from some drugs can be dangerous – even life-threatening.

Many options are available.

- **Medications** can help you taper off drug use, ease withdrawal or prevent relapse. *For example, you can get replacement therapy for opioid dependence: Methadone is available through many licensed programs. Buprenorphine is a prescription medicine that requires only monthly doctor visits.*
- **Counseling** to find ways to avoid drug use and deal positively with underlying issues.
- **Self-help organizations**, such as 12-step programs with regular meetings that provide a support network.

More Information and Help

- **For information from the Health Department, visit nyc.gov/health or call 311. Additional Health Bulletins are available.**
 - #45 Depression: It's Treatable
 - #48 How Much Is Too Much (Alcohol)
 - #55 Taking Your Medicine: How to Make It Easier
 - #61 Help to Stop Using: Drug Problems Can Be Treated
 - #66 Marijuana – Is It Holding You Back?
 - #69 Is Your Child Abusing Prescription Drugs?
- **LifeNet offers 24-hour confidential help for substance abuse and mental health problems.**
 - English: 800-LifeNet (800-543-3638)
 - Spanish: 877-AYUDESE (877-298-3373)
 - Asian languages (Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean): 877-990-8585

Other Resources

- **Office of National Drug Control Policy:** www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/prescr_drg_abuse.html
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse:** www.drugabuse.gov/drugpages/prescription.html
- **Narcotics Anonymous:** www.newyorkna.org or 212-929-NANA (212-929-6262)
- **Pills Anonymous:** www.pillsanonymous.org or 212-874-0700
- **CALL 911 in any medical emergency.**



For copies of any Health Bulletin

All Health Bulletins are also available at nyc.gov/health

Visit nyc.gov/health/email for a free e-mail subscription

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 2

Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#77 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

125 Worth Street, Room 1047, CN 33
New York, N.Y. 10013

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner

Bureau of Communications

Geoffrey Cowley, Associate Commissioner
Cortnie Lowe, M.F.A., Executive Editor
Drew Blakeman, Senior Writer

Prepared in cooperation with:

Division of Mental Hygiene
Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use Prevention, Care and Treatment



Prescription Drugs

When Does Use Become Misuse?

**DIAL
311**

For Non-Emergency New York City Services
Telephone Interpretation in More Than 170 Languages