

## DOPE DEALER... OR PHARMACY?

### Answer the following question:

Deadly drugs can be most easily purchased from:

- a.) the sleazy guy who operates under the bridge after dark.
- b.) right over the counter at your neighborhood drug store, supermarket or convenience store.

If you answered “b,” you are correct. If you’ve gotten into the habit of heading for the drug store or the medicine cabinet in order to feel good, you’re probably already addicted. Even though those medications were purchased legally, they are just as dangerous as illegal drugs when abused.

## LEGAL DOESN'T CANCEL LETHAL!

Today more young people than ever are buying their highs legally, right over the counter. The number of young people purchasing legal medications for “highs” has grown so large that the practice has been given its own code name: OTC (Over The Counter) Drug Abuse.

OTC drugs are just as dangerous as prescribed and illegal drugs. Young people across the nation are becoming physically, psychologically and behaviorally addicted, and some are even dying because they think if it's legal then it's safe. They're wrong.



## THE DRUG SCENE CHANGES

In the recent past, the drug scene was “illegal” and dominated by names such as marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, methamphetamine (meth), heroin and LSD...among others. According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids (PDFK), today's drug scene is changing rapidly to legal because teens think it is a safe high. While the use of illegal drugs by young people has remained stable, the misuse of OTC medications is growing. Experts predict the abuse of OTC medications will soon surpass that of marijuana, cocaine and meth because of how easy they are to get.

“OTC drugs are just as dangerous as prescribed and illegal drugs.”

## HOW BAD IS IT?

- OTC drug abuse is so prevalent among today's youth that health officials are now calling these abusers “Generation Rx.”
- OTC drug abuse is the direct cause of 540,000 hospitalizations each year.
- A shocking 1.3 million teens reported abusing OTC cough medicine to get high.
- In a ten-year span, OTC abuse admissions to drug treatment centers skyrocketed to more than 30 percent.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

[www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

### American Addiction Centers

[www.americanaddictioncenters.org](http://www.americanaddictioncenters.org)

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

[samhsa.org](http://samhsa.org)

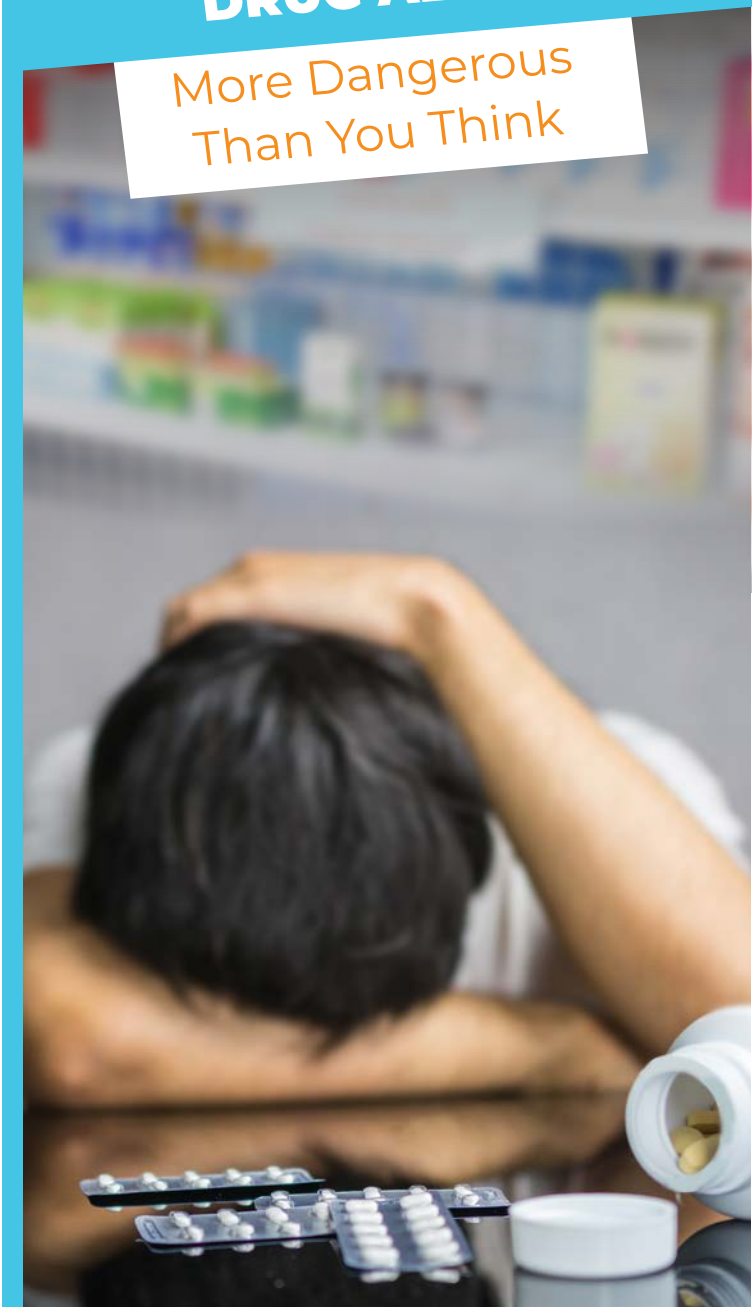
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# OTC (OVER THE COUNTER) DRUG ABUSE

More Dangerous  
Than You Think





## THE DANGERS OF OTC

OTC drug abuse can be just as dangerous as taking illegal drugs. Though they come in lower doses and different forms, OTC drugs are taken in larger quantities to get the same high that prescription and illegal drugs produce. This causes OTC drugs to be just as dangerous as illegal drugs because they are easier to get and just as addictive.

## OTC PAINKILLERS

Some OTC painkillers, though weak, are opioids — a drug found in heroin and opium. When taken in large quantities, the opioid receptors in the brain catch these chemicals, block pain, and turn the pleasure system on. While the user is feeling a content and dreamy rush, their body may go into total shock. When mixed with alcohol or allergy meds, OTC painkillers can shut down the lungs.

## OTC COUGH MEDICINE

More heavily abused than OTC painkillers are OTC cough medicines, which include Dextromethorphan (DXM) — a hallucinogenic narcotic that can be found in more than 120 OTC medications. It has earned a number of “catchy” street names: Triple C, Skittles, Red Devils, Robo, Vitamin D, Tussin.

## OTC SHORT-TERM SIDE EFFECTS

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Anxiety
- Nightmares
- Hostility
- Steady mood changes
- Blurry vision
- Inability to think clearly
- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Poor memory
- Poor coordination
- Poor performance at work and school
- Sleep disturbances
- Confusion
- Numbness
- Hallucinations

## OTC LONG-TERM SIDE EFFECTS

- Liver complications
- Ruptured blood vessels
- Death
- Heart palpitations and failure
- Stroke
- Harm to the brain vessels
- Depression
- Seizures
- High blood pressure

## HOW DO PEOPLE MISUSE OTC DRUGS?

- Taking medications in a higher dosage than directed
- Taking the medications for longer than recommended
- Taking medicine that is not needed
- Taking medicine for the affect (to get high)
- Mixing multiple medicines to get a ‘new’ high

## COMMONLY ABUSED OTC MEDICATIONS

Cough and cold medicines

Pain relievers

Nasal decongestants

Motion sickness pills

Anti-diarrheal medication

Diet pills

OTC sleep aids/sleeping pills

## OTC AND ADDICTION

One in five teens have abused OTC drugs in their lifetime and 33% of teens report that they see little to no issue with using unprescribed medication. Many teens don’t even realize they are misusing OTC drugs until they are already addicted.



## TEENS AND OTC ABUSE... WHY?

There are other reasons why people fall victim to OTC drug addictions besides getting high. Girls suffering from anorexia and bulimia often turn to laxatives and diuretics. Athletes pushed to “play through the pain” take mega doses of “pain pills.” High-achieving students turn to caffeine-laced OTC stimulants or diet pills to cram in all night study sessions. While these can be used in moderation, teens use these OTC drugs often and not for their intended purposes. There are better ways to get that extra help you need. Stay away from OTC drugs.

## IT’S TIME TO GET HELP

OTC drug abuse and addiction are serious and can be life-threatening. If you need help, there are many people to turn to. A good place to start is with a trusted family member or friend. School counselors, coaches, teachers, or nurses are also people who can help. There are websites and call centers devoted to getting you the help you need. If you have a problem with OTC drugs, don’t wait... get help now!

**OTC drugs are not the answer to your problems or a way to have fun.**