

**ADDICTIVE, DESTRUCTIVE AND DEADLY**

When prescription medications are taken as prescribed by a doctor for an illness, they may be mistakenly thought of as being safe or harmless. However, when these medications are not taken as prescribed, they are not safe.

All of the commonly-abused prescription drugs – including pain relievers, sedatives, stimulants, and tranquilizers – are addictive. This includes prescription opioids, such as Vicodin and OxyContin, central nervous system depressants, such as Xanax and Valium, and prescription stimulants, such as Ritalin and Adderall.

All of these medications carry the risk of severe side effects when abused and can lead to many negative health consequences, including addiction and even death.



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**PRESCRIPTION DRUGS: A DEADLY EQUATION**

Many people are under the impression that those who recently began abusing prescription drugs are the most likely to experience an overdose or die as a result of their drug use. However, chronic abusers of prescription medication face a higher risk of death.

When ongoing drug use is a problem, the body’s chemistry changes from day to day. Yesterday’s “normal” dose may be overwhelming today. The combination of prescription drugs with other drugs and alcohol can add up to a deadly equation. Those who abuse prescription drugs may require rehab to safely stabilize their health, end their addiction, and achieve lasting sobriety.

**LONG TERM HEALTH RISKS**

Physical dependence	Decreased brain function
Addiction	Organ damage and failure
Withdrawal symptoms	Overdose
Paranoia and depression	Death

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

To know more about the impact of prescription drug abuse on your health, go to:

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

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**  
[nida.nih.gov](http://nida.nih.gov)

**in the know**

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**PRESCRIPTION  
DRUG ABUSE**  
*HOW IT AFFECTS  
THE BODY*







### HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE LUNGS

When an opiate such as oxycodone or hydrocodone is smoked, fluid builds up in the lungs, causing shortness of breath. Opiates and similar prescription drugs suppress the body's ability to breathe and interfere with normal lung function, raising the risk of pneumonia.

### HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE STOMACH & INTESTINES

Opiates are known for causing constipation, even at their normal dosage.

When painkillers are abused, users are taking far more of the drug than a doctor would ever recommend, which causes compounded side effects. Long-term abuse of painkillers forces many users to rely on laxatives to move the bowels or risk damage to the digestive tract.

Other symptoms of abuse include nausea, bloating, vomiting, and abdominal distention.

### HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE MUSCLES & KIDNEYS

When a person abuses painkillers to the point of becoming unconscious it can result in a condition called "rhabdomyolysis."

Rhabdomyolysis is a rapid breakdown of muscle tissue that occurs when a person lies completely still for a number of hours. The compression experienced by the muscles causes the tissue to begin to disintegrate and release chemicals into the bloodstream. This causes a chain reaction of damage in other organs, including kidney failure.

If dialysis is not started in time, the person can die.



EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

KIDNEY FAILURE

### HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE LIVER

The liver processes every drug a user ingests. Prescription painkiller abuse causes a great amount of stress on the liver due to toxins stored during the breakdown process. In particular, the acetaminophen that is included in many common drugs like Vicodin, Lortab, and Percocet contributes heavily to severe liver damage, and even liver failure.

### HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM

Central nervous system (CNS) depressants work by slowing down the brain's normal activity (Valium, Xanax, sleep medications etc.).

CNS depressants can be deadly when abused or taken in large doses. They are even more dangerous when combined with alcohol and other drugs. Long-term effects of CNS depressant abuse include brain damage that affects motor function, seizures, addiction, overdose and death.

### HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE HEART

Long-term abuse of prescription drugs causes heavy strain on the heart. Abnormal heart rate, increased body temperature and high blood pressure are common side effects of prescription drug abuse. This can lead to collapsed veins, heart attacks, heart failure and death.

FATAL OVERDOSES



### PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS: VICIOUS CONSEQUENCES

Abuse of amphetamine-like substances, such as Ritalin, leads to loss of appetite, insomnia, and increased heart rate. When Ritalin is abused through injection or snorting, it puts an even greater strain on the body and can have fatal effects on the heart. Injection can lead to infectious diseases and abscesses. When injected into the blood stream the filler materials found in these drugs block the small blood vessels. This causes serious damage to the lungs and eyes. Severe emotional conditions, such as hallucinations and psychotic behavior, can be caused by even short-term abuse of prescription stimulants.

**TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH NOW – DON'T ABUSE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS!**