NO PREP

Prescription Drugs

Use vs. Abuse in Teen Life

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Prescription Drugs: Use vs. Abuse in Teen Life

Safe Use of Prescription Medication

Prescription drugs are a cornerstone of modern medicine. When used correctly, under the supervision of a licensed healthcare provider, they can treat conditions ranging from short-term infections to chronic illnesses. For teens, antibiotics, ADHD medication, and anxiety prescriptions can dramatically improve quality of life. However, proper use includes following dosage instructions, avoiding alcohol or other contraindicated substances, and consulting a doctor about any side effects. It's vital to understand that these medicines are formulated based on specific medical needs; taking them recreationally or in a manner not intended by the prescribing physician can lead to severe consequences.

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Commonly Abused Prescription Drugs

In many schools, there is a rising trend of sharing or selling opioid painkillers (like oxycodone), ADHD stimulants (like Adderall or Ritalin), and anxiety medications (like Xanax). Teens may use stimulants to pull all-night study sessions or opioids to experience a euphoric "high." Yet, these drugs carry high addiction potential, and misuse can spiral into life-threatening problems. A student might start by taking a pill to manage stress or physical pain and end up developing tolerance and dependence. Opioid misuse, in particular, has reached epidemic levels in certain regions. Teens often underestimate the strength of these medications and the potential for overdose.

Dangers of Mixing Substances

One hidden danger is the mixing of prescription drugs with other substances, including alcohol or illicit drugs. Combining different depressants, such as anxiety meds and alcohol, can slow breathing to dangerously low levels. Alternatively, mixing

stimulants with certain over-the-counter cold medications could trigger severe cardiovascular stress. The body's pathways for metabolizing drugs can become overwhelmed, leading to toxic buildup or organ damage. Medical professionals strongly advise against taking prescriptions in any way that deviates from the label instructions or pharmacy guidance.

Dependence, Overdose, and Death

Addiction doesn't typically happen overnight. It often starts with curiosity or a moment of desperation—maybe a teen wants to excel academically, or they feel immense pressure to cope with emotional pain. Over time, the body adapts, requiring more of the substance to achieve the same effect. This tolerance leads to increased dosage, and, in turn, a higher risk of overdose. For opioids, an overdose can lead to respiratory failure and death. Even non-fatal overdoses can cause permanent organ damage. Tragically, many teens are unaware of the severity of this threat until it's too late.

Refusal Strategies and Seeking Help

Peer pressure and easy availability often contribute to prescription drug misuse. Learning refusal strategies can be crucial: a firm but polite "No, thanks. I'm good," or an immediate exit from a risky situation can save you. Trusted adults, such as school counselors or coaches, can also offer guidance if a teen feels tempted or is already struggling with misuse. In some cases, therapy or rehabilitation programs are necessary. Recognizing the signs—mood swings, secrecy, deteriorating academic performance—can help friends and family intervene before addiction takes hold.

Key Information: Prescription Drug Quick Facts

Type of Drug	Intended Use	Risks When Misused
Opioids	Pain management	Respiratory failure, overdose, severe addiction
Stimulants	ADHD, narcolepsy treatment	Heart complications, high blood pressure, dependence
Sedatives	Anxiety, insomnia	Drowsiness, dizziness, harmful with alcohol

Case Study Excerpt

Alicia struggled with chronic back pain after a sports injury. Her doctor prescribed a low-dose opioid to manage her discomfort so she could continue physical therapy. At first, she followed instructions diligently. But as her pain persisted, she took more pills than recommended, desperate for relief. Before long, Alicia found herself unable to get through the day without taking multiple pills well beyond her prescribed dose. She began running out of refills weeks early, and to avoid confrontation with her parents, she started buying pills from a classmate. One evening, Alicia felt especially anxious and took a larger dose, mixing it with a friend's anxiety medication. She soon became dangerously lethargic and found it hard to breathe. Panicked, her friend called 911, and paramedics rushed Alicia to the hospital, where she was treated for a near-fatal overdose. Alicia survived, but the scare forced her and her family to confront the severity of her dependence. With medical support and counseling, she began the long road to recovery, learning coping techniques for pain that didn't rely solely on medication. Alicia's experience illustrates how prescription misuse can escalate unexpectedly, even for someone who starts with legitimate medical needs. It also shows that every misuse carries life-threatening risks, emphasizing the importance of proper guidance and caution.

1. How did Alicia's legitimate medical need evolve into prescription drug misuse?

2. What critical event made Alicia realize the seriousness of her situation?

Multiple Choice

1. Which category of drugs is often prescribed for pain but can lead to severe addiction if misused?

    a) Beta blockers

    b) Antibiotics

    c) Stimulants

    d) Opioids

2. What is a potential outcome of mixing different types of prescription drugs or combining them with alcohol?

    a) Guaranteed safe experience due to medical supervision of prescriptions

    b) Severe respiratory depression or organ damage

    c) Instant health benefits

    d) No effect at all

3. Tolerance occurs when the body:

    a) Develops an immunity to the drug

    b) Automatically heals itself without medication

    c) Needs higher doses to achieve the same effect

    d) Completely rejects all medications

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Refusal Strategy	A) Requires more of a substance for the same effect
2. ___ Dependence	B) Clear method or phrase to decline offers of a substance
3. ___ Tolerance	C) Drug that alleviates pain but can cause respiratory failure if misused
4. ___ Opioid	D) Taking a toxic or fatal amount of a substance
5. ___ Overdose	E) Body's physical or psychological need for a substance

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. _____ abuse often starts when teens share medication meant for legitimate medical conditions.

2. A high tolerance can push a user toward _____, a situation where the body physically or mentally depends on the drug.

3. Mixing prescription sedatives with alcohol can lead to extreme _____ depression.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Why might teens underestimate the danger of prescription drug misuse?

_____

_____

_____

2. How can peers positively influence someone struggling with prescription drug abuse?

3. What step can be taken if a teen suspects they're developing a dependence on their medication?