



Prescription drug addiction: Hitting close to home

It may not be as talked about as illegal drug abuse and it may not be as well publicized, but prescription drug addiction can be just as destructive, taking a toll on your health and your relationships. People who abuse medication may hide the addiction or take desperate measures to get a drug. There is hope, however. Knowing the signs of abuse is an important first step.

An estimated 20 percent of Americans have taken medication for reasons different from why it was prescribed. There are several possible explanations, including:

- **Medications are legal and prescribed by doctors.** As a result, people may be more likely to think it's OK to take the drugs longer or differently than directed.
- **They may be easy to get.** A person may lie to a doctor about symptoms to get a prescription. Friends and family may not think twice about sharing medications. Also, disreputable websites may sell drugs without a prescription.
- **Certain medications can have side effects that are considered desirable.** For example, Adderall, used to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, can decrease appetite. People may use the drug to lose weight.

Taking any medication without a doctor's supervision is dangerous. Some medications may cause dependence and possibly addiction. If a person takes a physically addictive medication for a long period of time, their body may build up a tolerance. As a result, they may feel the need to take more of the drug to feel its effects. If they try to stop taking the medication, it's possible they will experience withdrawal symptoms because, by that point, they may need the drug in order to just feel "normal."

Being dependent on a drug can cause serious issues:

- Impaired judgment while driving or in other situations
- Neglected responsibilities at work, home or school
- Health problems, including increased blood pressure, heart rate and body temperature, or decreased sleep and appetite
- Destructive behavior, like lying and stealing to get the medication

It can be hard to recognize a problem with prescription drugs in yourself or a loved one. But, there are some signs you can look for:

- Building greater tolerance
- Experiencing signs of withdrawal
- Having trouble stopping or controlling use
- Taking larger amounts than prescribed
- Using the medication for longer than prescribed
- Spending significant time getting, using and recovering from the drug
- Missing important work or social events
- Continuing use despite knowing there's a problem

It's important that people with an addiction get help. The most common option is outpatient treatment. This may include one-on-one or group therapy sessions with a mental health professional. Depending on the situation, treatments can also include medication or inpatient treatment.

If you believe someone you know has a problem with prescription medication, talk with them; however, be prepared for excuses or denial. A doctor, counselor or other professional can give you tips to start your conversation. OptumHealth Behavioral Solutions is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

Always take your medication exactly as your doctor prescribes. These tips can help:

- Follow directions carefully
- Don't change doses without talking with your doctor
- Don't stop taking medication on your own
- Don't crush or break pills
- Understand the drug's effects on daily tasks
- Learn about the drug's potential interactions with alcohol and other medications
- Tell your doctor about any history of substance abuse
- Don't use other people's prescription medications and don't share yours

The Live and Work Well website, liveandworkwell.com, is an online health and wellness resource. The access code login is 877-468-1016. You can also call the toll-free number at 877-468-1016.

Use the search phrase "prescription drugs" to learn more about taking medications safely. You can also use the search phrase "drug abuse" to learn more about inappropriate use of prescription and over-the-counter drugs. ☒