



# Taking ACTION to prevent & address PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE



EDUCATE *before*  
**YOU MEDICATE**

The NCPIE  
Coalition-working  
together to promote  
safe medicine use

National Council on Patient Information and Education  
[www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)



## A Resource Kit for America's College Campuses

### What You Can Do: Tips for Raising Awareness about Prescription Drug Abuse on Campus

Whether you're a resident assistant, peer health educator, a leader in student government or involved in the Greek system, or captain of your athletic team, you can make a difference by helping to raise awareness about the dangers of prescription drug abuse. Below are some things you and other campus leaders can do to help protect your peers from prescription drug misuse and abuse and other high risk behaviors.

Help spread the word and prompt action on your campus.

- 1. Create opportunities around specific events and holidays to talk about prescription drug abuse.** Since many students who abuse prescription drugs take them along with alcohol and other drugs, plan awareness activities around events and dates typically associated with alcohol consumption, such as spring break and holidays (homecoming, Thanksgiving, New Year's Eve, Saint Patrick's Day, Memorial Day).

“Team up with student clubs that promote healthy decisions and behaviors.”

In addition to year-long efforts, you can also plan a concentrated effort during a particular month. For example, you might consider dovetailing your efforts with activities planned for the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) annual “Talk About Prescriptions” Month ([www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)) or during National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week, both of which take place in October.

- 2. Make headlines.** Believe it or not, amid all of the new technologies, the campus newspaper remains a leading source of information for a majority of college students and surveys show students tend to read it regularly.

Contact the editor of your school's newspaper and pitch the idea of writing a story about the growing trend toward and dangers of prescription drug abuse and misuse. Help him or her understand why it is relevant to college students and important to expose the problem. Use the template newspaper article in [“Sample Newspaper Article/Online”](#) provided as part of the [“Taking Action to Prevent and Address Prescription Drug Abuse”](#) resource kit to “pitch” the story around

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midterms or finals when many students might be vulnerable to mounting academic pressures and may be more inclined to turn to prescription medications to cope with stress or as a study aid.

- 3. Hit the airwaves.** Secure a public service and/or sponsorship announcements (PSAs) on the campus radio station and/or during college athletics (for example during half-time events or time outs). Better yet, bring the campus radio station on as campaign media partner to give your message more play. Sample PSAs might include:

### 30-second PSA

*Planning an all-nighter to cram for an exam or write that term paper you've been putting off? If you're thinking about taking a prescription stimulant like Adderall or Ritalin that hasn't been prescribed for you by your doctor, you may end up falling further behind in a big way. Using stimulants to "get in the zone" and focus is not only dangerous, experts say doing so won't improve your grades over time. But you will put your future at risk. Your best bet for getting good grades? Don't procrastinate or skip sleep. For more information about the danger of prescription drug abuse, visit [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).*

### 30-second PSA

*Have you ever used a friend's prescription painkiller like Percocet to get rid of a headache? Or taken a prescription stimulant like Adderall or Ritalin to help you study the night before an exam? What about experimenting with someone else's prescription medication to get high?*

*If so, you've misused or abused prescription drugs, maybe without even knowing it. Mixing these medications with alcohol or other drugs can increase your risk of addiction, overdose and even death. Don't screw up your life. Think twice before you take someone else's prescription meds and don't share your medication with others. For more information about the danger of prescription drug abuse, visit [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).*

“Create an online PSA and link to it from your Facebook page.”

### How to place your PSA

- Call your campus radio station and get the name of the person who handles PSA placement.
  - Ask how to submit or record a PSA (you may have better luck if you offer to go to the station and record it).
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- Most stations will read PSAs from a script (see samples provided in this resource kit).
  - Find out when and how often it will run.
  - If possible, create an online PSA and link to it from your Facebook page.

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### 30-second sponsorship spot for athletic event

*Planning on cutting loose during [homecoming week/March Madness/this week's big game]? Don't add prescription drug abuse to your party plans. More and more students are turning to these medications to get high or feel good. But taking these medications without a prescription or medical supervision—even once—can lead to serious problems, such as overdose and even death, especially if they are mixed with alcohol, marijuana and other drugs.*

*This message is brought to you by the National Council on Patient Information and Education. For more information, visit [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).*

4. **Person on the street.** Pitch a story idea to the campus TV station. Encourage them to conduct man on the street interviews to capture students' awareness and attitudes about prescription drug misuse and abuse on campus. Share useful information including facts and figures, what to watch for, as well as key message points; see the college resource kit at [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org) for these and other useful materials.

Ask about starting a special interest group to come up with creative ways to raise awareness about prescription drug abuse on campus.

5. **Start a committee or special interest group within student government.** Student government associations (SGAs) act as a liaison between the student body and the school's administration. SGAs give students a voice in setting school policy and addressing emerging and important issues brought before them by their peers.

If you sit on student government or know someone who does, ask about starting a special interest group to come up with creative ways to raise awareness about prescription drug abuse on campus. Educate student leaders about the dangers of prescription drug abuse and how it can negatively impact student life.

6. **Update your school's academic honor code.** Insert a pledge to avoid and prevent prescription drug abuse along with commitments pertaining to use of alcohol and street drugs. Find out whether this message can also be part of the written or verbal codes of conduct used by collegiate athletic groups and Greek organizations. If a club you're interested in doesn't have a drug policy, encourage them to adopt one that includes banning the non-medical use of prescription drugs.
7. **Distribute brochures, posters and other materials around campus.** Get educational materials about the dangers of prescription drugs into the right hands. Find out if your school's student health service will place the "[You're in Control, Using Prescription Medicine Responsibly](#)" brochure (pdf coming soon) or [poster](#) (pdf coming soon) in high traffic areas like the waiting room.
8. **Engage residence halls and dorms.** Talk with your school's resident assistants about setting up a bulletin board in common areas of residence halls to educate students.

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- 9. Team up with student clubs that promote healthy decisions and behaviors.** Student-led groups including peer health educators can help champion the issue of combating prescription drug abuse and may be willing to distribute educational materials during health fairs, festivals and other campus-wide events. Visit [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org) to download the **“Get the Facts: Prescription Drug Abuse on College Campuses”** fact sheet, brochure and other helpful resources.
- 10. Take the pulse of your peers.** Develop a simple poll to gauge awareness and prevalence of prescription drug misuse and abuse on campus. Print out questionnaires and place them on tables in the dining hall. Coordinate with school administration to leave a box for people to drop their anonymous responses. Sample questions might include: Have you ever shared your prescription medication with a friend, peer or roommate at college? Have you ever taken a stimulant to help you study or complete school work? Do you think prescription drugs are safer than street drugs like cocaine or heroin? etc. Report the findings through key organizations or the campus newspaper.
- 11. Be on the lookout for opportunities to insert important messages.** Volunteer to give presentations on the dangers of prescription drug abuse to different student groups and organizations. Your school's *First Year Experience* would be a perfect opportunity to deliver important prevention and treatment information to incoming students. Encourage organizers to add messages and materials from the resource kit as part of the curriculum related to substance abuse and high risk behaviors. Include the medication safety and refusal skills handout, **“Mind Your Meds: Basic Medication Safety Tips.”** for students who are legitimately taking medications to keep these drugs from falling into the wrong hands.
- 12. Go virtual, tap into social networks.** To expand your reach, post messages about the dangers of prescription drug misuse and abuse to your social networks (Twitter, Facebook, campus blogs, etc.). You might consider posting a message about avoiding prescription drug abuse as your Facebook status for a week during finals time. See: **“Tips for Promoting Responsible Prescription Medicine Use Online.”** Sample messages might include:

*“Did you know misusing or abusing prescription medications—stimulants, pain relievers and sedatives—is every bit as dangerous and illegal as abusing illicit drugs like cocaine and heroin?”*

*“Not to be a buzz kill, but if any of you are thinking about taking someone else's prescription medications to get high, study better or cope with stress, think again. When used without medical supervision, these medications can lead to addiction, overdose and even death.”*

*“Did you know misusing or abusing prescription medications—stimulants, pain relievers and sedatives—is every bit as dangerous and illegal as abusing illicit drugs like cocaine and heroin?”*

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*“One in four people aged 18 to 20 report using prescription drugs non-medically at least once in their lives, which can lead to addiction, overdose and death. Don’t be a statistic.”*

You might also consider providing tips for studying, relaxing and staying healthy while dealing with the demands of college life. Be sure to direct friends to [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org) for helpful tools and resources.

**13. Start a fan page.** You can set one up from your personal Facebook account and invite others to join. Ask friends and campus organizations to link to and promote NCPIE’s campus resource kit via Facebook, websites and Twitter. Post weekly prevention messages, tips for healthy living and [“How to Create a Facebook Page to Communicate with Students”](#). Sample messages and stress busters to share with your friends might include:

- **Manage your time.** Time management is key—use your iPhone, computer or Blackberry to schedule time for class, study, sleep and fun. It will help you stay on top of things.
- **Eat right.** Make sure to get enough fresh fruits, vegetables and lean protein. This will improve your energy and ability to think clearly.
- **Stay active.** Exercise gets endorphins—your brain’s natural feel-good chemicals—pumping. It’s one of the best ways to beat stress and stay healthy.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Try to get seven or eight hours each night. Being sleep deprived slows your thought process, impairs memory and delays your reaction time. Plus people who are well rested do better on exams.
- **Get support.** Turn to family and friends for support during this exciting, yet challenging time in your life. Remember, you can only do your best.

“The reality is that prescription drug abuse is not the norm and it can jeopardize someone’s future, increasing their risk of other risky behaviors, addiction, overdose and even death.”

Link to and showcase other resources. If you don’t have time to keep up with regular posts, use a social media dashboard service ([www.HootSuite.com](http://www.HootSuite.com)) that lets you connect to multiple social networks and schedule posts in advance from one website.

**14. Tell it like it is.** When asked, most college students tend to overestimate their peers’ non-medical use of prescription drugs. This might actually make it more likely for some students to justify engaging in this behavior; they might think, “Hey, no big deal, everyone is doing it and these drugs are safe anyway.”

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“Still, by students' sophomore year in college, about half of their classmates will have been offered the opportunity to abuse a prescription drug.”

The reality is that prescription drug abuse is not the norm and it can jeopardize someone's future, increasing their risk of other risky behaviors, addiction, overdose and even death. Most college students know it's not worth the risk to misuse or abuse prescription medications. One in four people aged 18 to 20 reports using these medications non-medically at least once in their lives. Still, by students' sophomore year in college, about half of their classmates will have been offered

the opportunity to abuse a prescription drug (NSDUH, 2008; Arria, 2008).

Research shows that students who take prescription drugs for non-medical reasons are at least five times more likely to develop a drug abuse problem than those who don't. (McCabe, 2008). So it's a slippery slope. When academic and social pressures mount, encourage your friends and peers to keep it together and find healthy ways to deal with stress and avoid peer pressure.

Other important messages about prescription drug abuse and misuse can be found at [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).

- 15. Listen up and intervene if needed.** If you overhear a friend, roommate or teammate talking about misusing or abusing prescription drugs either to get high or feel good or help manage everyday stressors, talk to him or her. Try to lend your support and urge them to get help before things spiral out of control. Consult your resident assistant, college student health services, a family doctor or find a local treatment center by visiting the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) online treatment center locator at [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov).

For more information and tools to help address prescription drug misuse and abuse on your campus, visit NCPPIE's web site at [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).