

Please remind your patients that prescription drugs, when used correctly and under a doctor's supervision, are safe and effective.

## Additional Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
SAMHSA's Health Information Network (SHIN)  
1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)  
[www.SAMHSA.gov/shin](http://www.SAMHSA.gov/shin)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)  
240-276-2750  
[www.csat.samhsa.gov](http://www.csat.samhsa.gov)

SAMHSA's National Helpline  
800-662-HELP (800-662-4357) (Toll-Free)  
(English and Spanish)  
800-487-4889 (TDD) (Toll-Free)  
Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator:  
240-276-2548  
[www.samhsa.gov/treatment](http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment)

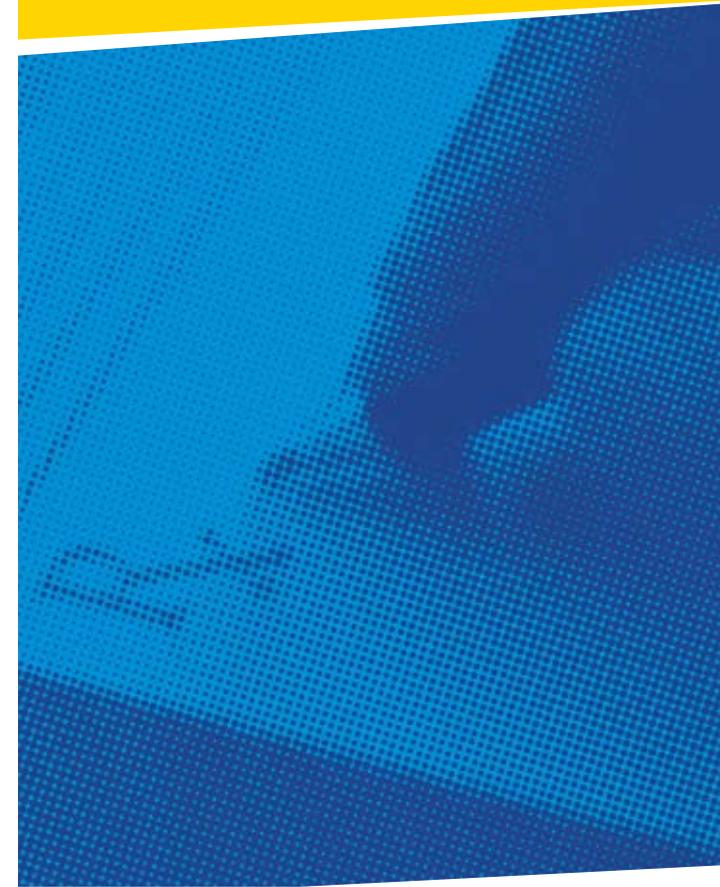
National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE)  
301-656-8565  
[www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)

Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)  
[www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com](http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com)

Society for Adolescent Medicine  
816-224-8010  
[www.adolescenthealth.org](http://www.adolescenthealth.org)

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Not Worth The Risk  
X even if it's legal



**TALKING** to your patients  
about prescription drug abuse

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Spend at least part of each visit with your teenaged patients without their parents in the room. Empathize with the stresses of growing up and identify positive outlets that can help relieve their stress, such as sports teams and youth groups. Also ensure that adult patients know how to store and use medicines safely.

## How common is prescription drug abuse?

- Nearly one in five teens report abusing prescription drugs to get high.
- The majority of the drugs were obtained through a single doctor.
- Teens most commonly abuse pain relievers (e.g., OxyContin® and Vicodin®), stimulants (e.g., Ritalin® and Adderall®), and sedatives and tranquilizers (e.g., Valium® and Xanax®).

What can I do as a  
**healthcare**  
provider?

You can influence your patients' decisions about how they use prescription drugs—but nearly half of physicians find it difficult to discuss prescription drug abuse with patients. However, even a brief screening can make a difference. For example, ADHD patients taking prescription stimulants need to be prepared to deal with other students who may ask for their drugs as a study aid.

## Why do kids abuse prescription drugs?

- They are seeking psychological or physical pleasure.
- They do not understand the risks of taking drugs that were not prescribed specifically for them. They also fail to realize the danger of mixing prescription drugs with alcohol, other prescription drugs, and illegal drugs.
- It is easier to get prescription drugs than illegal drugs.
- There is pressure to get better grades or to fit in with friends. They also may not be aware of other, positive alternatives to help them deal with stress.

## What do teens and adults not always realize?

- Abusing prescription drugs, even if they are prescribed by a doctor, is not safer than abusing illegal drugs.
- Misusing prescription drugs *can* lead to addiction.
- Using prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription or abusing someone else's prescriptions—or your own—is *always* harmful, not to mention illegal.
- Patients *must* take special precautions when storing medicines at home to prevent their abuse by others.

## Could my teenaged patients, their families, and other patients be at risk?

- Prescription drug abuse is second only to marijuana use among some teens.
- More than a quarter of drug-related emergency-room visits for people of all ages dealt with prescription drugs in 2005.
- It is surprisingly easy for teens to gain access to these drugs from friends or their own families' medicine cabinets. Adult patients may also participate in "doctor shopping," moving from provider to provider to get multiple prescriptions.
- Teens are turning to more dangerous methods such as crushing pills, then snorting or injecting their contents. They also are combining them with alcohol or illicit drugs. At "pharming parties," they may dump a variety of prescription drugs in a bowl and take them without knowing what they are.
- Children, teens, and college students are savvy Internet users and sometimes order controlled prescription drugs from illegal Web sites.

## What happens when prescription drugs fall into the wrong hands?

Many teens—and adults, too—have carefree attitudes toward the use of prescription drugs. People ages 12 to 25 have among the highest rates of prescription drug abuse. Your teenaged patients, their families, and other adult patients may be misinformed about the safe storage and hazards associated with the nonmedical use of prescription drugs.

## What questions should I ask my teenaged and adult patients?

At each visit with teenaged patients and their guardians, screen for potential drug problems. Try the **CAGE** screening tool with teens:

- Have you ever felt the need to **C**ut down on your use of prescription drugs?
- Have you ever felt **A**nnoyed by remarks your friends or loved ones made about your use of prescription drugs?
- Have you ever felt **G**uilty or remorseful about your use of prescription drugs?
- Have you **E**ver used prescription drugs as a way to "get going," to "calm down," or to "study better"?

Additionally, when you meet with adults (including those with teens at home), ask how they use and store medicines in their household. Parents often underestimate teens' use of prescription drugs.

Ask the following questions:

- What medicines have you taken and when?
- Are you missing prescription drugs from your medicine cabinet?
- Does your pharmacy claim to have prescriptions you did not know about?
- Do you understand how to take your medicines, what other medicines you should avoid while taking them, and how you can safely store them in your home?

## What should I remind my patients to do?

- **Respect** the power of medicine and use it properly.
- **Recognize** that all medicines, including prescription drugs, have risks along with benefits. The risks tend to increase dramatically when medicines are abused.
- Take **responsibility** for learning how to take prescription drugs safely and appropriately. Seek help at the first sign of their own, a friend's, or child's problem.

## How can I help?

- ✓ **Determine what medicines** have been in the house and how they are stored before prescribing certain drugs.
- ✓ **Record** how often a patient asks for refills.
- ✓ **Encourage patients to avoid stockpiling medicines** and store them safely. Instruct them to promptly and properly dispose of any unused medicines.
- ✓ **Speak to all patients** about prescription drug abuse—illegal drugs and alcohol are not the only threats.
- ✓ **Provide tips to parents.** A brochure for parents, "Talking to your kids about prescription drug abuse," is available at [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).
- ✓ **Teach patients how to watch for the negative side effects** of a prescribed drug and what to do if this is suspected.
- ✓ **Give teens information.** A brochure for teens, "Prescription Drugs: They can help, but also hurt," is available at [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).