



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



A Resource Kit for America's College Campuses

Sample Newspaper/Online Article

Campus newspapers are a great way to make your fellow students aware of important issues. Contact the editor of your campus paper and encourage him/her to publish an article about the dangers of prescription drug abuse, especially around high stress times like midterms, final exams and even other campus events like "homecoming." You can tailor the following article to your college or university by adding your own quotes or interviewing a well-known or respected campus leader.

AS EXAM WEEK NEARS, SOME STUDENTS MAY TURN TO RISKY "STUDY AID"

Exams are just around the corner, and for many college students that means little sleep and a lot of added stress and anxiety. While it's not uncommon for the typical college student to survive all night study sessions with the help of a little extra sugar and caffeine, a few will turn to something far more risky: **prescription drugs**.

Prescription drug abuse is a serious and growing problem on college campuses across the U.S. These days, the non-medical use of prescription medications—most notably stimulants (Adderall, Concerta, Ritalin), pain relievers (Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, methadone), and sedatives/tranquilizers (Valium, Xanax, Ativan, Ambien)—is second only to marijuana use among college students. Although most college students use prescription drugs as prescribed, about one in four people aged 18 to 20 report using these medications nonmedically at least once in their lives (NSDUH, 2008), and many more have been offered these medications by friends or fellow students.

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“It's a real problem—one that campus administrators, students and parents need to be more acutely aware of,” said [REPRESENTATIVE FROM (NATIONAL ORGANIZATION/LEADER)] about scope of problem. “By students' sophomore year in college, about half of their classmates will have been offered the opportunity to abuse a prescription drug. When misused or abused, these medications have the potential for addiction and many students may not even realize they are putting themselves in harm's way.”

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That's because college students who misuse prescription drugs aren't always looking to get high. More often, they take these medications to help manage their daily lives—to reduce the stress and anxiety of college life, boost their mood, stay up all night writing a term paper or increase their stamina on the field during the big game. College students are twice as likely as others their age to use stimulants nonmedically, mostly as “study aids”—to increase energy levels, improve concentration and help them stay up all night cramming for exams.

These students might believe popping a pill might give them an edge when it comes to improving academic performance, but many underestimate the serious risks of misusing or abusing prescription drugs.

“Campus life can be stressful and most students mistakenly believe that prescription drugs are safe just because they are legal. But when prescription medicines are misused or taken without a doctor's prescription, or taken in combination with alcohol, they can be just as harmful as illegal street drugs like cocaine and heroin” says [INSERT NAME OF CAMPUS HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL OR STUDENT LEADER, TITLE, SCHOOL NAME]. “Abusing prescription drugs doesn't help students get better grades, but it can jeopardize their health and safety, and they may suffer the consequences for years to come.”

When taken as directed and by the person for whom they are prescribed, these medications can help people with a host of medical conditions feel better. But the inappropriate use of prescription medications can cause serious health problems ranging from increases in blood pressure and heart rate to overdose, organ damage, seizures, and sometimes even death. Prescription drug abuse may be especially problematic for students with underlying or undiagnosed health conditions like heart disease.

“Healthcare professional prescribe medications based on an individual's health and medical history, and what is appropriate for one person may not be safe for another,” [SAYS XXXXXX]. “When used the wrong way, prescription drugs can become habit forming and set the stage for abusing other harmful substances.”

In fact, 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.

“A big part of the problem is that these medications are easy to obtain. They can often be found on bedside tables or in dresser drawers and medicine cabinets in dorm rooms and family homes,” says Ray Bullman, Executive Vice President of the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE). “Young adults get prescription drugs from friends, roommates or relatives by stealing, buying or simply asking for them. In some cases, students abuse their own prescription medications by taking higher or more frequent doses than directed by their healthcare professional or providing them to their friends.”

Students who are misusing prescription drugs may exhibit physical changes like dilated pupils, shaking, loss of coordination, or slurred speech. They may also have sudden and unusual mood swings or behavior changes including irritability or loss of interest in friends and activities.

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[NAME OF CAMPUS HEALTH REP/STUDENT LEADER] recommends that students combat stress by getting an early start, studying with friends, hiring a tutor if needed, and focusing on proper nutrition and rest in the weeks leading up to exams. If students are having trouble handling the pressure of exams, they are encouraged to talk to with their professors, resident advisor or a member of campus health services. Students are also urged to keep their own prescription medications in a safe place and not be pressured into sharing medicines with roommates and friends.

[NAME OF COLLEGE] is working to raise awareness about the dangers of prescription drug misuse and abuse with the help of a new resource kit developed by the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE). [“Taking Action to Prevent and Address Prescription Drug Abuse”](#) is available at www.talkaboutrx.org and includes a number of materials and ideas for addressing prescription drug abuse on campus.

[NAME OF COLLEGE] has planned the following activities to help students deal with stress during [MIDTERMS/FINALS WEEK OR OTHER CAMPUS EVENTS LIKE “HOMECOMING”].

EDITOR’S NOTE: SEVEN QUICK & EASY WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS

1. **Eat healthy foods** including fresh fruits, vegetables and lean protein. This will improve your energy and ability to think clearly.
2. **Stay active.** Exercise is one of the best ways to beat stress. Even a few minutes every day can help.
3. **Study with friends.** Being in a group will help you feel less isolated, and you may even have a little fun.
4. **Build in time for breaks.** Take a few minutes to take a walk, practice deep breathing or other relaxing activities that help you clear your head and feel reenergized.
5. **Get plenty of rest.** You might not be able to get as much sleep as you’re used to, but aim for at least 6-7 hours each night. People who are well rested do better on exams.
6. **Avoid using any drugs or alcohol.** They can cloud your mental abilities and actually harm your performance.
7. **Get support.** Turn to family and friends for support during this exciting, yet challenging time in your life. Remember just do the best you can do.

What’s the Difference? Prescription Drug Misuse vs. Abuse

It all comes down to intention. Taking prescription drugs to feel good or get high is an example of drug abuse. Misusing a medication might include taking your own prescribed medication differently or at a higher dose than was advised by your healthcare professional or self-medicating with someone else’s (for example, taking a friend’s Percocet to treat a headache, sharing a sleeping aid with a friend who needs a night of good sleep). Whatever the reason, using these medications nonmedically—even just once—is very dangerous, and might even be illegal.