

# The Risks of Prescription Drug Abuse

## Protect your brain from addiction



Prescription drug abuse is a real danger, especially when it comes to narcotic (or opioid) pain killers. They can be highly addictive and can be as dangerous as street drugs. Even when legally prescribed by a doctor, this type of drug must be carefully monitored and correctly used to avoid dependence, addiction, damage to your body and brain, overdose or even death. Please take this this issue very seriously, not just for yourself, but also for your kids. Here are five ways you can keep your family safe from prescription drug abuse:

### UNDERSTAND THE RISKS

- In a study published by the CDC <sup>1</sup>, researchers reported that physical dependence on opioids can begin after just a few days of use.
- Opioids aren't the only type of prescription drugs that come with risks. Be aware that other legal drugs—like tranquilizers, sedatives, and hypnotics (used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders) and stimulants (like cognitive enhancers used to treat attention-deficit disorders or depression)—can also be addictive or have harmful side effects when not used properly. <sup>2</sup>
- The biggest cause of overdose deaths in adults and youth comes from prescription drug abuse. <sup>3</sup>

### USE YOUR PRESCRIPTIONS CORRECTLY

- Only take medication that is prescribed to you—and in the correct dose.
- Never use prescriptions for any reason other than the pain or injury they were prescribed for.
- Never share your prescriptions with others.
- Ask your doctor how your prescription will interact with other medication or alcohol.
- Remember pain medication isn't like an antibiotic—you don't need to finish the whole prescription. Quit using them as soon as you can.

### TALK TO YOUR KIDS

- When it comes to prescriptions, keep a close watch on your kids—and your medication. In one survey, half of teens believed prescription drugs are safer than illegal street drugs. <sup>4</sup>
- According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, teens who abuse prescription drugs are twice as likely to use alcohol, five times more likely to use marijuana, and twelve to twenty times more likely to use illegal street drugs. <sup>5</sup>
- Talk to your kids about the risks of prescription drug abuse. Set clear rules about using medication only as it is directed by a healthcare professional.

### ASK YOUR DOCTOR / DENTIST ABOUT ALTERNATIVES

- Opioids can be useful for some types of pain, such as cancer or end-of-life care. But there are many other effective (and perhaps safer) pain management options available, such as non-narcotic drugs, physical therapy, behavioral therapy, and alternative medicine.
- If you or your child are prescribed opioids, have a conversation with your doctor or dentist to find out if that choice is right for you and you understand how to use them safely. Here are some questions you can ask your healthcare provider before taking an opioid.
  1. Do I really need an opioid? Is there a safer alternative?
  2. What are the risks for me?
  3. Is my prescription for the lowest dose?
  4. How can I avoid addiction and what are the warning signs?

Screenshot these questions so you have them next time you visit a doctor or dentist.

### STORE AND DISPOSE YOUR PRESCRIPTIONS SAFELY

- Store your prescriptions securely out of sight and reach of family or friends, especially kids. Keep track of the number of pills so you know if any are missing. Don't combine prescriptions in one bottle; keep them in the original container. Many problems with prescription drugs start with people getting them from family or friends, so keep yours locked up.
- Never keep or use leftover or expired prescriptions. Dispose of them safely at a medicine take-back event or location, such as a drop box at a pharmacy or police station. You can also mix them with an unappealing substance such as dirt or used coffee grounds and throw them away in a sealed bag at home. Remove your information from the bottle.

1. Anuj Shah, Corey J. Hayes, PharmD; Bradley C. Martin, PharmD, PhD, "Characteristics of Initial Prescription Episodes and Likelihood of Long-Term Opioid Use — United States, 2006–2015." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Published by the CDC. 3/17/17. 66(10):265–269.

2. Drugabuse.gov

3, 4, 5. Foundation for a Drug-Free World