



Prescription Medication Abuse

Prescription Drug Addiction is a rapidly growing worldwide problem with a high causal factor of mortality. It is estimated that as much as 15% of the South African population suffers from drug addiction in one form or another. With no accurate figures or statistics gathered in relation to Prescription Drug Addiction, the amount of people who are suffering from this form of addiction is largely unknown. Most people view irresponsible use of prescription medication as inconsequential in comparison to hard core drugs. The fact that they are made by reputable companies, prescribed by doctors and dispensed by pharmacies, reinforces that perception. As a result, many people misuse prescription or over-the-counter medication at some time in their lives. Whilst the overwhelming majority put the pills away with no lasting effect, many suffer the consequences of abuse and addiction.

Effects of abuse/addiction



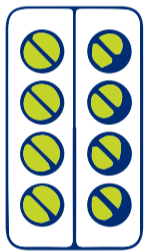
Although intended for health improvement, many prescription drugs are, unfortunately, also potentially addictive, with similar effects and consequences as "hard" drugs or illegal substances. Withdrawal can be dangerous to mental and physical health and may therefore require careful medical supervision, medical detoxification and drug rehabilitation.

3 Most addictive types of medication

- **Stimulants:** These are 'uppers', usually prescribed for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or other hyperactivity disorders. These are popular amongst students as it keeps the user alert for days at a time. However, it may also lead to agitation, irritability, irregular heartbeat, insomnia, paranoia, elevated body temperature and seizures.
- **Sedatives/tranquilisers:** These are used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders. This is something that is easily diagnosed, thus many believe sedatives to be the 'norm' and can easily be misused. Sedatives or tranquilisers can easily lead to drowsiness, confusion, uncoordinated movements, poor decision making and memory loss.
- **Opiates:** These are 'downers,' usually used to treat chronic pain and for psychiatric relief. Opiates are highly addictive and if abused may lead to withdrawal symptoms. Some common effects and symptoms of opiate abuse include confusion, disorientation, constipation, depression, decrease in blood pressure and respiratory problems.



Effects of abuse/addiction



- Increasing the dosage because they think it will accelerate healing
- Using it after the medical need is over, because they enjoy the "high"
- Mixing it with other drugs to enhance the impact of the other drugs
- To stay awake, energetic, alert, sociable or to meet work deadlines
- To reduce emotional distress, or to overcome sleep disorders

Signs of abuse/addiction



- Requesting replacement prescriptions regularly
- 'Losing' prescriptions
- Breaking or crushing medication
- Stealing prescriptions
- Taking medication from family members and friends
- Visiting multiple doctors for the same or similar medical conditions
- Forging prescriptions
- Ordering medication over the internet
- Mood swings



On reaching out

Acknowledge that you have a problem – it's the first step in seeking assistance

Believe in a friend whom you think can help – speak to them

Contact the CCDU office on info.ccd@wits.ac.za or alternatively call the

Wits Student Crisis Line **0800 111 331**

SOME USEFUL CONTACTS:



Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa
0861 HELPAA (435 722)



Al-Anon
0861 ALANON (25 26 66)



Narcotics Anonymous SA
083 900 MY NA (083 900 69 62)



SA National Council on Alcoholism
and Drug Dependence (SANCA)
08611 REHAB (73422) or
(011) 673-0400



Department of Social
Development's
Substance Abuse Line
0800 12 13 14 or
SMS 32312

REFERENCES:



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