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WELLNESS WEEKLY

Prescription Drug Abuse

Prescription drugs are the second most commonly abused category of drugs. The National Institute of Health estimates that nearly 20% of people in the United States have used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons. Prescriptions to pain medication can be safe when taken according to the doctor's instructions and are carefully monitored. However, it is important to recognize they can also be very dangerous. Dependency is a disease that can exhibit itself to even the most cautious individual. Therefore, anyone who is prescribed pain medications should take extra precautions to avoid the effects of dependency and watch for the warning signs:

1. **Usage Increase** - It is common for individuals taking prescription medications to grow tolerant to the effects of their prescribed dose. If someone you know seems to be increasing their dose over time, this is an indication that the amount they were taking is no longer providing them relief
2. **Change in Personality** - Shifts in energy, mood, and concentration may occur as every day responsibilities become secondary to the need for the relief the prescription provides
3. **Social Withdrawal** - May withdraw from family, friends and other social interaction
4. **Ongoing Use** - Continued usage after a medical condition has improved will result in the person needing extensions on their prescription. The person might talk of how they are "still feeling pain" and need just a little longer on the medication in order to get well. They might also complain frequently about the doctors who refused to write the prescription for one reason or another
5. **Time Spent on Obtaining Prescriptions** - A dependant person will spend large amounts of time driving great distances and visiting multiple doctors to obtain the drugs. Watch for signs that he or she seems preoccupied with a quest for medication, demonstrating that the drug has become their top priority
6. **Change in Daily Habits and Appearance** - Personal hygiene may diminish as a result of a drug addiction. Sleeping and eating habits change, and a person may have a constant cough, runny nose and red, glazed eyes
7. **Neglects Responsibilities** - A dependent person may call in sick to work more often, and neglect household chores and bills



8. **Increased Sensitivity** - Normal sights, sounds and emotions might become overly stimulating to the person. Hallucinations, although perhaps difficult to monitor, may occur as well
9. **Blackouts and Forgetfulness** - Another clear indication of dependence is when the person regularly forgets events that have taken place and appears to be suffering blackouts
10. **Defensiveness** - When attempting to hide a drug dependency, abusers can become very defensive if they feel their secret is being discovered. They might even react to simple requests or questions by lashing out

MOST ABUSED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

The National Institute on Drug Abuse identifies three classes of prescription drugs that are most often abused.

OPIATES

Opiates are powerful drugs that are used to relieve pain. These narcotic pain killers go by such names as OxyContin, Darvon, Vicodin, Dilaudid, Demerol and Lomotil, and are often prescribed for post-operative pain.

DEPRESSANTS

Central nervous system (CNS) depressants have such trade names as Nembutal, Valium and Xanax. These drugs are used to treat anxiety, panic and sleep disorders and can be highly addictive.

STIMULANTS

Stimulants like Dexedrine, Ritalin and Adderall are used in weight loss treatment programs, to treat sleep disorders, and to aid those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The health risks of abuse of stimulants include dangerously high body temperature, seizures and cardiovascular complications.