



Why Are Prescription Drugs Abused?

One-third of the drug abuse problem in the United States can be linked to drugs regulated by prescription. These drugs are not smuggled into the United States, nor are they secretly manufactured. They are manufactured legally in the United States by legitimate companies, and then are diverted into the illicit drug market. Prescription fraud is a way of getting legitimate drugs into the illegal market. Prescription fraud may occur through:

- A customer who passes a bogus prescription at the local pharmacy
- A pharmacy technician who changes a prescription to a more potent drug
- A pharmacist who dispenses unauthorized refills.

Even a physician may become involved in the highly profitable diversion of controlled substances. Fraudulent prescriptions usually have a higher street value than the cost of obtaining them. Many abusers prefer prescription drugs because of their purity. Illegal drugs are often contaminated by unknown substances. Drugs involved in prescription fraud include narcotics,

stimulants, tranquilizers and psychoactive substances manufactured for legitimate medical treatments. More than 231 million prescriptions are written each year. Five percent of these prescriptions are diverted for illegal use, which translates to 350 million dosage units. Three out of every 10 drug overdoses stem from abuse of prescription drugs.

All drugs are powerful chemicals. Along with their benefits, they also have a potential for harm.

Adverse Reactions — Some drugs can cause side effects ranging from mild headaches to irregular heart beats. When a reaction is unexpected or severe, consult your doctor immediately.

Drug Interactions — Two or more drugs taken simultaneously can affect the way one or the other behaves in the body. For example, even non-prescription drugs, such as antihistamines used to treat cold symptoms, can increase the effects of anesthetics, barbiturates, and some pain-killers.

Food and Drug Interactions — Food can interact with drugs, making them work faster or slower, or even preventing them from working. For example, large amounts of liver or leafy vegetables may hinder drugs used to thin the blood. Vitamin K in these foods promotes blood clotting, nullifying the effects of the drug.

To protect yourself from being a victim of prescription abuse, and to prevent the spread of substance abuse:

- Keep a list of all drugs you are taking to show your doctor and pharmacist.
- Check with your doctor if a drug is not doing what it is supposed to, or if you are experiencing unexpected symptoms.
- Keep taking your medicines even if you feel better, or until your doctor tells you to stop.
- Never take medicine prescribed for someone else.
- Check drug labels for specific instructions or warnings, such as "do not take on an empty stomach" or "while taking this medication, do not drive or operate heavy machinery."