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(559) 734-4288 - CA Lic. 0B20964

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# Children's Health: Prescription Drug Safety

Drug abuse is always a concern with teens, but a growing trend is the abuse of prescription medications, which can be just as dangerous as illicit drug use. Parents should take precautions to keep their children safe.

## Drugs Commonly Abused

A large variety of prescription drugs can be abused, including painkillers, depressants (like sleeping pills), stimulants (such as ADHD or asthma medications), steroids and more. In addition, over-the-counter (OTC) drugs such as cold medicine and diet pills are often abused by teens.

## Risks

Many people think prescription and OTC drugs are not dangerous, since they are either prescribed by a doctor or available from a store. However, taken in excess, they can be just as dangerous as illegal drugs, causing addiction, serious illness and even death.

Teens may abuse prescription and OTC drugs because they think they are safer than other drugs, or simply because they are more easily available. Many children you would never suspect of drug use may try it out of peer pressure, curiosity or misinformation. Unfortunately, all parents today need to think about keeping their medications safe to prevent abuse.

## Precautions

Consider taking the following safeguards against medication abuse in your household:

- Monitor all prescription medications in your house. Pay attention to how many pills are left and how often you expect to refill.
- Explain to kids that all medications should only be taken as instructed by a doctor and/or the label, and that prescription drugs

should never be shared.

- Dispose of old medications in the trash. You may want to conceal them so teens or others do not take them out of the trash later.
- Talk to your children about the dangers of abusing any drugs, and that prescriptions and OTCs can be just as dangerous as illegal drugs.
- If you are concerned someone in your house is abusing prescription or OTC drugs, you may want to hide your medications.



## Did You Know...?

A recent study conducted by the University of Michigan found that 6 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported abuse of cough or cold medicines to get high in the past year. These items can be easily purchased at any drugstore or supermarket.