



Assignment: You may hear information about prescription drugs in the news, online, or from friends. How do you know what's true? There's a lot to consider, and many teens have questions. Read on for answers to some frequently asked questions from teens.

medications can be abused when not taken as directed.

Q: Are prescription drugs safer than illegal drugs such as cocaine?

A: Abusers of prescription medications may mistakenly believe that because the drugs come from a pharmacy and not from a drug dealer they are safer to take, even at high doses or without a prescription. The fact is that if someone takes prescription medications in a manner that is not as a doctor intended, he or she could face serious health risks—and for certain medications those risks could be addiction and death. Also, abusing prescription drugs—including sharing prescriptions with friends—is illegal.

Q: How can prescription drugs cause death?

A: Opiates, such as Vicodin® and OxyContin®, can depress respiration [slow down a person's breathing] or stop it altogether. They can shut down the part of your brain that tells you to breathe. That's how people die from an overdose. Mixing certain prescription drugs, and even over-the-counter medicines, with alcohol is especially dangerous. If both substances depress respiration, they may amplify each other's effects when taken together—meaning the risk of serious harm or death becomes much greater than when either one is taken alone.

Q: What exactly is a prescription?

A: A prescription is a doctor's written order that authorizes a pharmacist to supply a specific medication for a patient, with instructions on its use. It says who can take the medication, in what amount, and for what length of time. Used exactly according to a doctor's instructions, prescription drugs are usually safe and effective.

Q: How does a doctor determine the prescription a person needs?

A: A doctor writes a prescription based on a patient's medical history, symptoms, and other factors. The doctor asks questions such as, "Are you allergic to any medications?" and "Are you currently taking any other medicines?" These questions help the doctor decide which medications to prescribe and which ones not to.

Q: Doctors prescribe prescription medications, so how can they be unsafe?

A: Prescription medications are powerful drugs. Doctors and pharmacists each take several steps to keep prescription medications safe for people who need them.

Doctors custom fit a prescription to a patient's medical history, age, weight, allergies, and other factors. Pharmacists dispense medication and help patients understand instructions for taking them. Oftentimes, this includes warning labels like: "Take with food" or "Avoid prolonged sunlight" or "Federal law prohibits the transfer of this drug to any person other than the patient for whom it was prescribed." When a friend gives you a prescription—whether it's to cure a sore throat or to get you high—there can be serious health consequences because the medication is tailored to your friend's needs, not yours.

Q: When is someone abusing prescription drugs?

A: Prescription-drug abuse is when someone takes a medication that was prescribed for someone else or purposely takes his or her own medication in a manner or dosage other than what was prescribed. Abuse can include taking a friend's or a relative's prescription to get high, to help you study, to lose weight, to build up muscle, or to treat pain. Even over-the-counter

CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper or discuss in a group.

1. Why is it important to tell your doctor about any medical conditions you have and all the medications you take, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, and dietary supplements?
2. What would you say to someone who asked you for pills that were prescribed only for you?
3. At a party a friend offers you alcohol and a pill. What would you do, and why?
4. Explain why the following statement is a myth: Prescription drugs come from a doctor and a pharmacy, so they must be safe.
5. Explain why the following statement is a myth: It's OK for me to use a prescription from the medicine cabinet that was prescribed for someone else in my family.