

HEADS UP

REAL NEWS ABOUT DRUGS AND YOUR BODY

Prescription Pain Medications: What You Need to Know

Statistics show that the abuse of prescription opioids—a type of pain medication—is a serious problem in the United States. In 2015, 4.4 percent of high school seniors reported using the prescription opioid Vicodin® for nonmedical reasons. More Americans die every year from overdosing on prescription opioids than die from illicit drugs such as cocaine or heroin. This article explains the risks of opioid pain medications and how opioids work in the body, and gives students advice about precautions that can lower their risk of addiction and overdose.



SUBJECT	COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS	NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS	NATIONAL SCIENCE EDUCATION STANDARDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Science Literacy English Language Arts Health/Life Skills Math (Graphs and Statistics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RST.7 Integrate information from a text and graph W.9 Draw evidence to support analysis and reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LS1.A Structure and Function LS1.D Information Processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure and Function in Living Things Personal and Community Health

Critical-Thinking Questions:

1. Explain how opioid medications work in the brain. How are they different from natural endorphins in the brain? *(Prescription opioids have a similar structure to endorphins, a type of chemical in the brain that blocks pain and contributes to feelings of pleasure and relaxation. Opioid medications act on the same receptors in the brain, brain stem, spinal cord, and other parts of the nervous system as endorphins do. These medications, however, have a stronger effect than endorphins; they are capable of blocking severe pain and flooding the brain's reward center with large amounts of dopamine, which puts a person at risk for addiction. If too much is taken, these drugs can cause a person to stop breathing.)*
2. What are three examples of prescription opioid misuse and/or abuse? Cite evidence from the article. *(Taking medication that was prescribed to anyone other than yourself; taking medication at higher doses than was prescribed; taking medication not to treat pain but to experience a "high.")*
3. Why might abuse of prescription opioids lead a person to start using heroin? *(Prescription opioid pain medications and heroin are both opioids and therefore have similar effects on the body. If a person becomes addicted to prescription opioids, he or she may start taking heroin to achieve the same result.)*

Writing Prompts:

- **Grades 6–8:** What are the risks of misusing prescription opioid pain medications? Use evidence from the article to support your answer.
- **Grades 9–10:** Use evidence from the article to explain why prescription drug abuse is as dangerous to your health as illegal drug abuse.

- **Grades 11–12:** How is dependence different from addiction?

Paired Reading:

- **Grades 6–12:** “Mind Over Matter: Opioids” teens.drugabuse.gov/educators/nida-teaching-guides/mind-over-matter-teaching-guide-and-series/opioids
- **Grades 6–12:** “Straight Talk on Prescription Drugs” headsup.scholastic.com/students/straight-talk-on-prescription-drugs
- **Grades 6–12:** “Prescription Stimulants” headsup.scholastic.com/students/prescription-stimulants

Additional Sources:

- **Website:** teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/opioids-and-pain-relievers
- **Videos:** headsup.scholastic.com/students/video-collection

Additional Tools for Lesson

Visit scholastic.com/headsup/opioids/tools for grade-tiered resources that support teaching this lesson and article:

- Expanded Answer Key for Critical-Thinking Questions and Work Sheet
- Tiered Adaptations of Critical-Thinking Questions
- Academic and Domain-Specific Vocabulary Lists
- Additional Writing Prompts
- Expanded Paired-Text Reading Suggestions
- Expanded Standards Charts for Grades 6–12

Resources and Support

- Teaching resources: headsup.scholastic.com/teachers and teens.drugabuse.gov

STUDENT WORK SHEET: The skills sheet on the reverse side has students analyze data regarding opioid prescriptions and overdose deaths from these medications. Critical-thinking questions help them link the data to what they learned in the article. See the “Additional Tools” document (details in gray box above) for guidelines and answers on how to evaluate student responses.

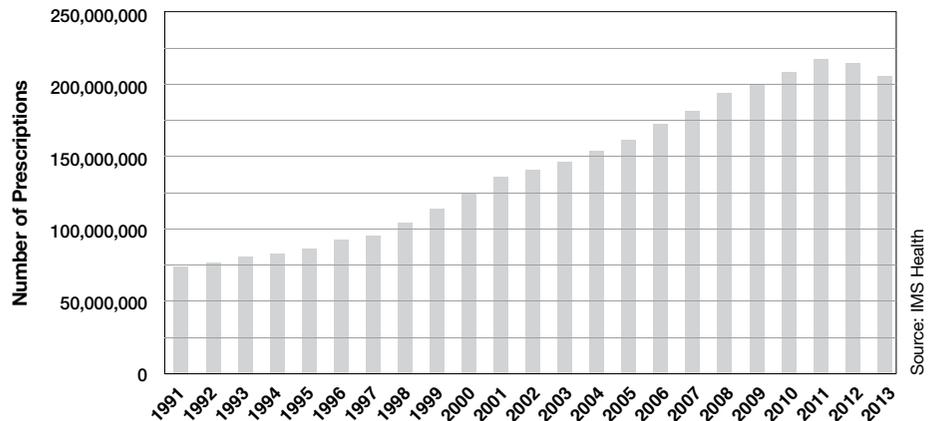
Prescription Opioid Use and Abuse

If a person takes too much of a prescription opioid, it can lead to a potentially deadly overdose. In recent years, public health officials have observed that the number of deaths caused by overdoses on opioid drugs is on the rise. What is causing this alarming increase? Some scientists see a relationship between the increasing number of overdose deaths and the rising number of prescriptions given during the past decade. Complete the activity below to analyze recent trends in opioid use and abuse.

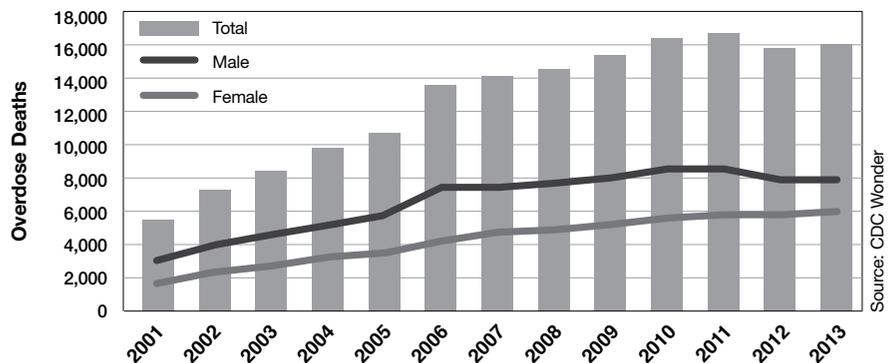
Directions:

Study the graphs on the right. Then use the data and the information in the article "Prescription Pain Medications: What You Need to Know" to answer the questions that follow.

Number of Opioid Prescriptions



Overdose Deaths From Prescription Opioids



Think It Through:

1. Roughly how many more prescriptions for opioids were given out by pharmacies in the U.S. in 2013 compared with 1991?
2. Approximately how many more people died from prescription opioid overdoses in 2013 than 2001?
3. Use data from the second graph to describe how the number of prescription opioid overdose deaths has changed over time for both men and women.
4. What evidence suggests that the number of opioid prescriptions could be linked to the number of overdose deaths? Use evidence from the graphs and the article to explain your answer.
5. Many scientists are urging the medical community to improve the way prescription opioids are prescribed. That may include using other, less powerful medications more often. Do you agree with this recommendation? What factors might scientists and doctors be considering? Use evidence from the graphs and from the article to support your answer.