## REMEMBER THAT:

- Prescription drug abuse refers to many things. It could mean using a medication not prescribed for you, using a medication in a manner other than prescribed (such as using more than the amount prescribed) or using a medication for the experience or feeling the drug can cause.
- If abused, some medications can slow breathing, cause irregular heartbeats, be addictive, and even kill you.
- Prescription medicines are usually safe when used correctly under a doctor's supervision. But using prescription drugs that aren't intended for you, or mixing them with any amount of alcohol or illicit drugs, can result in serious health conditions – some of which are fatal.
- If you have a friend who has had severe mood changes, is hanging out with a different crowd, or has less interest in school and hobbies, he or she may be exhibiting signs of prescription drug abuse. But help is available and recovery is possible.

*Please remember that prescription medicines, when used correctly and under a doctor's supervision, are usually safe and effective.*

SMA-12-4677B2

## RESOURCES

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) National Helpline:
800-662-HELP (800-662-4357)
(Toll-Free) (English and Spanish)
800-487-4889 (TDD) (Toll-Free)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment Locator:
*http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment*

SAMHSA's website:
*http://www.samhsa.gov*

SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's (CSAT's) ***Recovery Month*** website:
***http://www.recoverymonth.gov***

To order SAMHSA publications:
*http://store.samhsa.gov*

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) for Teens:
301-443-1124
*http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov*

FDA Safe Disposal of Unused Medication:
*http://www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou/consumers/buyingusingmedicinesafely/ensuringsafeuseofmedicine/safedisposalofmedicines/ucm186187.htm*

National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE):
301-340-3940
*http://www.talkaboutrx.org*

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SAMHSA
www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

*The statistics in this brochure are from the Partnership at Drugfree.org's 2010 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study: Teens and Parents.*

This brochure was prepared under contract number HHSS283200700008I/HHSS28300002T (Reference Number 270-08-0209) through the Office of Consumer Affairs in the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

# PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

They can help but also hurt

Not Worth The Risk
even if it's legal

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
www.samhsa.gov

## ABUSING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS – NO BIG DEAL. . .

WRONG!

Prescription drug abuse means using a medication in a different way than how it should be used, including using greater amounts than prescribed. Even if a medicine is specifically prescribed for you, if you don't follow the instructions for using it safely, it may have the potential to be misused. But taking medicine that wasn't prescribed for you at all is abuse. **It's no different than abusing alcohol or illicit drugs.**

Many teens believe that prescription drugs are safer than alcohol or illicit drugs, and that abusing them isn't risky – **but it is, and it is also illegal.**

## WHAT COULD POSSIBLY HAPPEN TO ME IF I ABUSE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS?

The truth is:

- Abusing certain painkillers is similar to **abusing heroin** because their ingredients affect the brain in the same way.
- Sleeping pills can slow your breathing and your heart, which **can be fatal**–especially if combined with certain prescription pain medicines, alcohol, or over-the-counter cold remedies.
- Abusing medicines intended to treat ADHD can cause irregular heartbeats or deadly seizures. Mixing them with cold medicines could make these **dangerous effects** worse.

## MYTHS AND FACTS

You are smart enough to avoid abusing prescription drugs. But chances are you may have a friend who may not be. Nearly 1 and 4 teens (23 percent) report taking a prescription drug not prescribed to them by a doctor at least once in their lives.

Many teens are unaware of the dangerous risks of prescription drug abuse. Below are some common misconceptions and the facts about prescription drugs:

- **MYTH:** Prescription painkillers, even if they are not prescribed by a doctor, are not addictive.

  **FACT:** Prescription painkillers act on the same site in the brain as heroin and can be addictive.

- **MYTH:** There is nothing wrong with using prescription drugs without a doctor's consent.

  **FACT:** Taking prescription medicine that your doctor didn't prescribe and doesn't know about can be harmful, especially if it shouldn't be mixed with other drugs prescribed for you.

- **MYTH:** If a prescription drug is legal and widely available, it must be safe.

  **FACT:** Prescription drugs are safest when used correctly under a doctor's supervision. But taking prescription drugs that aren't intended for you and/or mixing them with alcohol or illicit drugs can result in potentially deadly consequences.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF ONE OF MY FRIENDS (OR I) HAVE A PROBLEM?

Prescription drugs are intended to make people who have a condition or illness better. When people use them for anything other than their recommended purposes, they are at risk for serious health consequences. Here are some things to look for if you suspect your friends are abusing prescription drugs:

- Are they hanging out with new friends or withdrawing from your group of friends entirely?
- Do these friends hold parties where everyone contributes medicines that are taken, often with alcohol or other illegal substances?
- Is there a notable change in their personality? Perhaps starting arguments?
- Do they seem drowsier on some days and have a lot more energy on others?
- Are they less interested in hobbies or school activities that they had been involved with?

*Because these signs could signal other problems, be sure to get help right away.*

## WHAT IF I NEED HELP?

If you notice a friend who needs help for abusing prescription drugs–or if you feel your own misuse has spiraled out of control–there are ways to get help. Talk to a parent, teacher, guidance counselor, or other trusted adult. There also are additional helpful resources on the back of this brochure. The sooner you acknowledge the problem, the better the chances are of overcoming an addiction–and ultimately saving a life.