

# TIPS for TEENS

## PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS



### THE TRUTH ABOUT PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS

**SLANG: BENNIES/DEXIES/PEP PILLS/SPEED/BLACK BEAUTIES/UPPERS/RED DEXIES/RED PEP/BLUE PILL/WAKE-UPS/LID POPPERS/TRUCK DRIVERS/RIDS/RITTIES/R POP/VITAMIN R/R-BALL/STUDY BUDDIES/SMARTIES<sup>1</sup>**

## GET THE FACTS

**STIMULANTS CAN HAVE NEGATIVE EFFECTS.** Prescription stimulants are used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy (an illness in which someone cannot stay awake); they are prescribed to increase alertness, concentration, and attention. However, misusing them can lead to problems relating to the heart, nerves, and stomach, possibly causing a heart attack, stroke, or seizures.<sup>2</sup>

**STIMULANTS CAN AFFECT YOUR BRAIN.** Stimulants increase the activity of the brain chemicals dopamine and norepinephrine. Rewarding experiences trigger dopamine release, which can lead to repeated use and addictive behavior. Norepinephrine affects blood vessels, blood pressure, heart rate, blood sugar, and breathing. Misuse of prescription stimulants—even for a short period of time—may lead to hallucinations, paranoia, or anger.<sup>3</sup>

**STIMULANTS CAN BE ADDICTIVE.** In 2018, approximately 1 million people aged 12 or older misused prescription stimulants for the first time in the past year. An estimated 561,000 people aged 12 or older had a stimulant use disorder (meaning that a person has problems with their health, school, or relationships because of their use of stimulants).<sup>4</sup>

## ? Q&A

**Q. WILL PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS MAKE ME SMARTER?**

**A. NO.** Prescription stimulants don't improve school performance for people who aren't diagnosed with ADHD.<sup>5</sup> Stimulants can affect sleep, which is vital for memory and learning.

**Q. A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE PRESCRIPTIONS FOR STIMULANTS, SO THEY MUST BE SAFE FOR ANYONE TO USE, RIGHT?**

**A. NO.** Research shows that overuse can result in side effects of prescription stimulants, including dangerous heart-related symptoms with risk of heart attack or stroke.<sup>6</sup>

**Q. IF I HAVE A STIMULANT PRESCRIPTION FOR ADHD BUT FEEL LIKE I NEED TO TAKE MORE THAN WHAT WAS PRESCRIBED BY MY DOCTOR, IS IT SAFE TO DO SO?**

**A. NO.** Taking more medication than prescribed can lead to increased risk of psychosis (loss of touch with reality), risk of heart attack and stroke, and risk of addiction.

### THE BOTTOM LINE:

All stimulants, including prescription stimulants, are dangerous and can be deadly. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust if you have questions.

### LEARN MORE:

Get the latest information on how drugs affect the brain and body at [teens.drugabuse.gov](https://teens.drugabuse.gov)

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS, CONTACT:

**SAMHSA**

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) (English and Español)

TTY 1-800-487-4889

[www.samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov) | [store.samhsa.gov](https://store.samhsa.gov)



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration



## BEFORE YOU RISK IT!

1

**KNOW THE LAW.** Taking prescription stimulants without a valid prescription or use of stimulants other than as prescribed is considered misuse and is illegal.<sup>7</sup>

2

**KNOW THE RISKS.** When prescription stimulants are taken in ways not prescribed, they increase a person's risk of dangerous health issues, including heart attack, stroke, or death—especially when taken through the nose or injected into veins.<sup>8</sup>

3

**LOOK AROUND YOU.** Even if you think your peers are using stimulants not prescribed to them, the truth is that a very small number of teens are taking this risk. In 2018, only 1.5 percent of young people between ages 12 and 17 had misused stimulants in the past year.<sup>9</sup>



## MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR FOR RESOURCES USED IN THIS

**"TIPS for TEENS,"**

visit [store.samhsa.gov](http://store.samhsa.gov) or call  
**1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)**  
(English and Español).

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**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration



## KNOW THE SIGNS

How can you tell if a friend is using stimulants? Potential side effects and symptoms include:<sup>10</sup>

- Increased blood pressure and heart rate
- Increased breathing
- Dangerously high body temperature with sweating
- Irregular heartbeat
- Heart failure
- Seizures
- Irritability
- Rapid speech, difficulty concentrating



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS MISUSING STIMULANTS?

### BE A FRIEND. SAVE A LIFE.

Encourage your friend to stop using or seek help from a parent, teacher, or other caring adult.

For 24/7 free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at:

**1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)**

or visit the SAMHSA Treatment Services Locator at [findtreatment.gov](http://findtreatment.gov)

<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). (2019). Prescription Stimulants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts>

<sup>2,3</sup> NIDA. (2018). Prescription Stimulants. *Drug Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-stimulants>

<sup>4</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2019). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (HHS Publication No. PEP19-5068, NSDUH Series H-54). Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-annual-national-report>

<sup>5</sup> Weyandt, L. L., White, T. L., et al. (2018). Neurocognitive, autonomic, and mood effects of Adderall: A pilot study of healthy college students. *Pharmacy*, 6(3), 58. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29954141>

<sup>6,7</sup> Weyandt, L. L., Oster, D. R., Marraccini, M. E., Gudmundsdottir, B. G., Munro, B. A., Rathkey, E. S., & McCallum, A. (2016). Prescription stimulant medication misuse: Where are we and where do we go from here? *Experimental and Clinical Psychopharmacology*, 24(5), 400-414. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5113141/>

<sup>8</sup> Faraone, S. (2019). Prescription stimulant misuse, abuse prevalent among adults with ADHD. *Healio*. Retrieved from <https://www.healio.com/psychiatry/add-adhd/news/online/%7Ba563cc8c-6633-43c1-be9e-2677e2f4951f%7D/prescription-stimulant-misuse-abuse-prevalent-among-adults-with-adhd>

<sup>9</sup> SAMHSA. (2019). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (HHS Publication No. PEP19-5068, NSDUH Series H-54). Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-annual-national-report>

<sup>10</sup> NIDA. (2018). Prescription Stimulants. *Drug Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-stimulants>