

WHAT TEENAGERS WANT TO KNOW ABOUT PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND COUGH MEDICINES

1. Aren't drugs that are prescribed by a doctor safe for anyone?

Drugs are usually safe when they are used by the person they were prescribed for and taken according to the doctor's instructions. But that doesn't make the drugs safe for someone else to take.

When a doctor writes a prescription, he or she thinks about the patient's height, weight, age, allergies, medical problems, and the other drugs the patient is taking. Then they tell the patient how much of the drug to take, when to take it, how to take it, and what not to mix with it.

But when you take a medicine prescribed for someone else, you have no idea how your body and brain will react. You could be taking many times the amount that a doctor would prescribe for you. Or you might be taking something that a doctor would never prescribe for you because it would cause you more harm than good.

Taking a drug prescribed for someone else is dangerous.

2. Can't uppers – prescription stimulants like Dexedrine, Ritalin, or Adderall – help you stay awake and study better?

These powerful drugs change the way your body's control center – the central nervous system – works. They speed it up. That's a very dangerous thing to do. These drugs can cause sleeplessness, twitching, fast heartbeat, severe weight loss, high blood pressure, and panic.

They are also very addicting – it's easy to get hooked. And the more you use them, the more your body gets used to having them, so you need to take more and more to get the same effect. You might start taking one of these drugs to stay awake, but you might end up not being able to sleep when you want to.

3. You said Ritalin is a stimulant and speeds up your brain and body. But one of my friends who has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) takes Ritalin to slow down and concentrate.

Ritalin does help people with ADD by slowing them down so they can focus better. But if you don't have ADD, Ritalin does the opposite. That's why taking drugs prescribed for someone else is never a good idea.

Doctors prescribe drugs to treat a medical problem. If you don't have that problem, the drug will affect you very differently, in ways you can't know.

4. Is it dangerous to mix downers like Xanax and Valium and other drugs?

It's always dangerous to mix drugs. It is especially dangerous to mix downers (sedatives) with alcohol. The combination slows the body down so much that you can become unconscious. You won't know what's happening to you and you lose control of your body. You could actually choke on your own vomit.

5. Why are uppers and downers both so dangerous?

Uppers and downers are dangerous because they change the basic way your body and brain work. They affect your central nervous system – that's the control center for everything you do. Like the central controls for other complex things like computers or

space shuttles, your central controls are a delicate system, tuned for just one purpose: to make *your* brain in *your* body do all the things you need it to do to keep you going and keep you healthy.

Trying to change how your controls work without knowing what you are doing makes about as much sense as just pulling wires out of a computer or changing the fuel for the space shuttle without testing it. You have no idea what the result will be, but it probably won't be good.

6. Someone told me I should always watch my glass or drink at a party. Why is that?

It's a good idea to do this so that no one can secretly put anything in your drink. Some drugs (especially one called GHB) have no smell and no taste. They can be slipped into a drink without your knowing it. These drugs can make you unconscious or so *dopey* that you can't defend yourself from any kind of attack.

If you see someone put something in a drink at a party, you should tell the person whose drink it is immediately so that nothing happens to them. You should also let an adult know that someone is adding things to people's drinks.

7. I've heard steroids can make boys look like girls and girls look like boys. Is that true?

Yes, it is true. Boys who take steroids get shrunken testicles and don't produce sperm. They can also become bald and develop breasts. Those last two effects are permanent. Girls who take steroids become masculine – they get facial hair, their voice gets deeper, and their breasts shrink. And those effects are permanent, too.

8. What's wrong with using prescription painkillers such as OxyContin (unless they are prescribed for you)?

The most important reason is that these drugs can kill you. Even one dose. You just stop breathing. These drugs come in many different forms and many different doses. You don't know what dose might be too much for you.

9. Can just trying Vicodin or OxyContin one time make you want more of them?

Yes, you can become addicted to these drugs instantly – it's not safe to experiment. Being addicted changes you and your brain – forever. It messes up your memory and makes you depressed. The things that you used to enjoy stop mattering because the drug is always the most important thing.

Unless a doctor prescribes these drugs for you, you should think of them as POISON.

10. Can you get "high" on cough syrup? The kind you can just buy in a drug store?

If you follow the instructions on the bottle, taking cough syrup will just help you stop coughing. But taking too much cough syrup, or taking a lot of cold medicine in pill or gel cap form, can cause hallucinations and make you violent and crazy acting. You will look freaked out and spend a lot of time throwing up.

Cold medicines usually have a lot of other things in them, so taking more than the recommended dose can damage your liver and kidneys. High doses can also make you lose control of your body – people can do anything to you and you won't be able to stop them.