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ADHD Drug Abuse

By CWK Network Producer

A recent survey in Nature Magazine shows that more people than ever, kids and adults, are using ADHD medication in hopes of increasing their concentration and focus. Some high school and college students use drugs like Ritalin and Adderall to improve their grades of tests and final exams, but that shortcut may come with a price.

“In a way that athletes have used steroids and other medications in the past to enhance their athletic performance, Adderall is actually being used to kind of pseudo-enhance their academic performance.”

– Heather Hayes, M.Ed., Counselor.

Nineteen-year-old Marisa McCorkle has been using Adderall for two years.

“I use it for various reasons,” she says, “like tests, it helps me on tests. [And it] helps me stay awake, and [with] studying.”

It sounds like a wonder drug. Adderall – an amphetamine commonly used to treat ADHD. But, studies show it’s being abused more and more.

“In a way that athletes have used steroids and other medications in the past to enhance their athletic performance, Adderall is actually being used to kind of pseudo-enhance their academic performance,” states Heather Hayes, a licensed professional counselor.

One of the biggest problems with using the drug recreationally is that most teens are unaware of its dangers.

Twenty-year-old “Dave,” a college student, says, “I think it’s pretty safe unless you’re taking five at a time.”

But experts say even in small doses, the dangers of taking Adderall can range from headaches, increased heart rate and insomnia to things far worse.

“Any amphetamine has the potential to give someone an amphetamine psychosis,” warns Hayes. “So when you take a lot of amphetamines and you’re not sleeping, then you will literally hallucinate. ... [You] will absolutely leave reality and become delusional and paranoid.”

Hayes says parents need to make the dangers of taking Adderall clear to teens. Otherwise, they may continue to believe it’s a cheap and easily available drug that helps them study. Marisa and Dave are examples of students with this belief.

“I get it for free, but I know people who will give ... maybe two to five dollars [per pill],” says Marisa.

“Actually, I’m gonna go to my doctor and, uh, try to get a prescription next semester,” says Dave, “‘cause I think it’s a really effective way to get good grades. I wouldn’t think it was that hard to, uh, fake having ADD.”

But others say Adderall fools you – that it only seems like it’s helping kids study. Amanda Mattison, 17, has seen first-hand what can happen.

“[Students taking Adderall] can focus when they’re taking it, and they study and they cram for five or six hours and they’re good-to-go for the exam,” she says, “but by the time the exam rolls around, they’re either too worn out or ... it’s lost it’s effect.”

“Bottom line,” says Hayes, “Adderall is as dangerous of a drug when unsupervised as any other medication. It’s addictive and it is dangerous.”

Adderall Dangers

By CWK Network, Inc

Adderall, manufactured by Shire Pharmaceuticals Group of the United Kingdom, is a stimulant prescribed for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. Shire states, "Adderall isn't intended to enhance test scores and should only be used under medical supervision."

Adderall is a fast-acting mixture of amphetamines. Amphetamines act on the brain by mimicking the neurotransmitter dopamine, which increases alertness and concentration. Studies conducted by the National Institutes of Health in the late 1970s found that low-dose stimulants increase concentration and alertness in everyone, not just people with attention disorders. Here are some things to know about ADHD:

- ADHD is a medical condition linked to a chemical imbalance in the brain. Doctors believe it stems from biological, not environmental, conditions.
- Generally, people with ADHD have trouble focusing on tasks or subjects, and they may act impulsively and often get in trouble.
- Approximately 3 to 7 percent of school-age children and 4 percent of adults suffer from ADHD.
- Adderall is one of a handful of stimulants prescribed for ADHD.
- Side effects of Adderall can include loss of appetite, insomnia and weight loss.

What Parents Need to Know

During late-night study marathons, students from grade school to med school have long relied on stimulants— which include everything from caffeine to cocaine. But with Adderall, and other similar prescription drugs, some high school and college students are hoping to improve scores on standardized (and even classroom) tests. Other students are turning to alternative medicine, such as hypnosis or herbal supplements, for an extra edge.

The concern with Adderall is not from a single use. One pill won't kill you. But one pill is likely to lead to a second pill, then a third and a subsequent snowball effect where physical damage can occur. Also, Adderall is relatively easy to obtain. Overall, prescriptions for stimulants have risen from 1.6 million in 2000 to 2.6 million a month in 2004. Adderall XR, a once-a-day, extended-release form of the drug, is the leader in its class, capturing about a third of the market. Consider the following:

- Prescription drug use was once rare, but it has now crossed into the mainstream.
- Prescriptive amphetamines have figured prominently in calls to emergency departments and poison control centers.
- Kids, and even their parents, are desperate for any available academic edge and willing to go to the extreme to obtain it.
- Some students feel extra pressure because they feel they are not just failing themselves, but also failing their parents and other family members.
- The College Board, the nonprofit administrator of the SAT, has no rules explicitly prohibiting drug use. Spokeswoman Chiara Coletti says, "We certainly do not recommend that students take any drugs or stimulants in hopes of affecting their scores."
- Some kids taking Adderall have valid prescriptions, but not all. Under federal law, it's illegal to knowingly possess a "schedule II" drug (like Adderall) without a prescription. But prosecutions for possession are rare.
- Many schools would suspend or expel a student caught using marijuana or other street drugs but might not punish students taking prescription drugs to help with test taking.

Resources

- [ADHD in Adults](#)
- [National Institutes of Health](#)
- [Nature Magazine](#)
- [Shire Pharmaceuticals Group](#)
- [TeensHealth](#)

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