

# Is Your Medicine Cabinet Safe?

Prescription Painkillers, Medications and Over-the-Counter Medicine Abuse

## Why you should be concerned

**FACT:** Among persons ages 12 or older who used pain relievers nonmedically in the past year, an estimated 70% obtained them from a friend or relative. *(NSDUH 2011)*

**FACT:** In 2011, nonmedical use of prescription drugs among youth and young adults ages 12 - 25 was the second most prevalent illicit drug use category, with marijuana being first. *(NSDUH 2011)*

**FACT:** According to the Federal Drug Abuse Warning Network, emergency room visits due to abuse of prescription drugs are greater than the number of visits due to abuse of marijuana and heroin combined.

**FACT:** Young adults ages 18-24 are particularly at risk, with increases in heroin/opioid treatment admissions throughout the state. In particular, upstate New York (222% increase in admissions) and Long Island (242% increase) have been hard hit by this problem. *(NYS Client Data System)*

**FACT:** Between 2007 and 2012, the number of individuals using heroin during the past 30 days more than doubled nationwide (161,000 to 335,000). *(NSDUH 2012)*

**FACT:** The percentage of New York State high school students who reported using heroin more than doubled between 2005 and 2011 (1.8 % to 4%). *Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)*

One of the most striking aspects of the misuse of prescription medications has been the increase in painkiller abuse, which can lead to heroin use. Prescription drug abuse is the use of prescription medication in a manner that is not prescribed by a health care practitioner. This includes using someone else's prescription or using your own prescription in a way not directed by your doctor.

Most people take prescription medication responsibly under a doctor's care. However, there has been a steady increase in the nonmedical use of these medications, especially by teenagers. Part of the problem is the availability of medications (over-the-counter and prescription) in the family medicine cabinet, which can provide easy access for children, adults, elderly and visitors. People often mistakenly believe these medications are safe because they are approved by the FDA and prescribed by a physician. Nonmedical use of certain prescription drugs can lead to addiction.

## What you can do

### Educate Yourself

- Be aware of the medications in your home. Have open conversations about appropriate versus inappropriate use of medication. Inform your friends and family that abusing medications can be just as dangerous as using illegal drugs.
- Ask your health care provider if any medications prescribed for your family have a potential for abuse.
- Be familiar with the warning signs of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse. Warning signs can be both behavioral and physical, and may include withdrawal from normal activities, irritability, unusual requests for money, unexplained changes in friends, and frequent nasal or sinus infections.

### Communicate with Your Family

- Remind family members in your home that many medications do not mix well with alcohol or other medications, including herbal remedies.
- Teach your teens and younger children to respect medicines. Medicines are important tools in health care but they must be used according to directions.
- Set clear expectations with your teenagers and let them know that under no circumstances should they ever take medications without your knowledge.



# How you can use the Medicine Cabinet Inventory

- List all prescriptions, including over-the-counter medications.
- Include the date of purchase and quantity.
- Include recommended dosage. Never increase or decrease doses without talking to your doctor.
- Keep all medications out of reach of all young children and adolescents.
- To properly dispose of unused or expired medications, dispose of medications in a community drop box site or mix them with used cat litter, coffee grounds or sawdust to make them less appealing, before throwing them in the garbage.

## Medicine Cabinet Inventory

Use the following chart to help keep track of the medications in your medicine cabinet.

List the name and strength of the prescription and nonprescription medications. Include the date filled, the expiration date, and the original quantity. Once a week, count the pills remaining and mark the date.

Medication Name and Strength	Date Filled	Expiration Date	Original Quantity	Quantity Remaining			
				Date	Date	Date	Date

The following organizations offer information and resources that can help you and your family.



**1-877-8-HOPENY**  
Find Help for 1-877-846-7369  
Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Problem Gambling



New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services  
[www.oasas.ny.gov](http://www.oasas.ny.gov)



New York State Department of Health  
[www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)



[www.combatheroin.ny.gov](http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov)