



Prescription and Over-the-Counter Cough Medicine Abuse

A parent's guide to the legal drugs kids are abusing

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Ask The Expert: Steve Pasierb on Teen Rx and OTC Medicine Abuse

A conversation with Steve Pasierb, President and CEO of The Partnership at Drugfree.org on preventing teen prescription and over-the-counter cough medicine abuse.

As President and CEO of The Partnership at Drugfree.org, Steve Pasierb is a national leader on the topic of teen drug use and abuse. He is a frequent commentator for the national and local news media on drug safety issues and the current trends in teen drug use. In collaboration with Be Smart. Be Well., Steve is working to raise awareness of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse and offers advice for keeping kids safe from drug use and abuse.

BESMARTBEWELL: Why are young people abusing prescription drugs?

STEVE PASIERB: Kids are coming to prescription (Rx) drug abuse for very specific reasons. Some aim to get high as a way of dealing with stress and depression in their lives. Some children are very tactical; they think prescription drugs will help them perform better in school. (Although studies have found that students who use prescription stimulants non-medically have lower GPAs, are more likely to be heavy drinkers and use other drugs, skip class more frequently, and spend less time studying than nonusers of prescription stimulants.) So kids usually have a very sophisticated usage approach when it comes to these drugs. It is not just as simple as using them to go out and get wrecked.

BESMARTBEWELL: What over-the-counter drugs are most abused by teens and young adults?

STEVE PASIERB: What kids seek in over-the-counter (OTC) drugs is an active ingredient in cough medicines, dextromethorphan, which gives them a drunk, dreamy, disassociated kind of feeling. Many kids become dependent on it, though. It has transitioned from a fringe behavior to something

more mainstream. One in 8 kids in America has abused cough medicine.

BESMARTBEWELL: What is the right age to talk with your kid about drugs, and how do I go about it?

STEVE PASIERB: The average age of first-time drug use in America is about 13 and a half years old. We encourage parents to have an age-sensitive conversation, not a “big drug talk.” If your kids are in middle school, you can say: “What are you hearing in school? What is going on? Who are your friends?” That gets you in. As your kid gets older, you should ratchet up the specificity of the conversation. Try, “What have you heard about this Ecstasy drug? Anybody in school talk about it?” This way, you’re not giving them a lecture on the harms of Ecstasy; you’re having a general conversation. The net of the conversation to your kid is that you’re worried, and that this isn’t an acceptable thing in your lives and family. That type of conversation is incredibly powerful, but it isn’t a lecture or a threat. Just a conversation.

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- [Besmartbewell.com](https://www.besmartbewell.com)
- [The Partnership at Drugfree.org](https://www.drugfree.org)

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Codeine

Fentanyl

Morphine

WHAT IS IT?	Codeine is a prescription pain reliever that may be used to relieve mild to moderate pain and to reduce coughing, when used in combination with other medications.	Fentanyl is a powerful pain reliever typically used to treat severe pain or pain after surgery.	Morphine is a powerful prescription pain reliever prescribed to relieve moderate to severe pain and is highly addictive.
BRAND COMMERCIAL NAMES	(Limited selection as there are over 50 brand names of codeine alone and in combination with other medications) Brontex®, Capital and Codeine®, Fiorinal® with Codeine (as a combination product containing Codeine Phosphate, Aspirin, Butabarbital, and Caffeine), Guiatussin® with Codeine, Mytussin® AC Cough Syrup, Robafen AC® Syrup, Robitussin A-C® Syrup, Tussi-Organidin®-S NR, Tylenol with Codeine (No. 2, No. 3, No. 4)®	Actiq®, Fentora®, Duragesic®, Sublimaze®	Roxanol®, Duramorph®
STREET NAMES	T3s, AC/DC, Coties	Apache, China Girl, Patches, Dance Fever	M, Miss Emma, Monkey, White stuff
LOOKS LIKE	Tablet, Capsule, Liquid	Dissolving tablet, Liquid for injection, Lollipop, Lozenge, Transdermal patch, White powder	Tablets, Liquid, Powder, Patch (included in part of fentanyl patch Duragesic®)
HOW IT IS USED	Swallowed	Injected, Smoked, Snorted	Injected, Swallowed, Smoked
DANGEROUS BECAUSE	Side effects when abused include: Difficulty breathing or swallowing, rash, itching, hives, changes in vision, seizures, and fast, pounding or irregular heartbeat	Serious side effects include: Weak or shallow breathing, severe weakness, drowsiness, confusion, cold or clammy skin, feeling light-headed, fainting, coma	Both physical and psychological addiction can develop quickly with morphine. Serious side effects of use include: Sedation, respiratory depression and arrest, unconsciousness, coma, death.
TEENS USAGE	1 in 6 teens have abused a prescription pain reliever	1 in 6 teens has abused a prescription pain reliever	1 in 6 teens has abused a prescription pain reliever
IMPORTANT TO KNOW	Sixty percent of teens who have abused prescription painkillers did so before age 15.	Nine million teens surveyed say they can get prescription drugs in a day.	Abusing prescription painkillers is just as dangerous, addictive and deadly as using heroin.
SIGNS OF ABUSE	Nausea, constipation, confusion, sedation, respiratory depression and arrest, addiction, unconsciousness, coma, euphoria/feelings of joy, drowsiness/lethargy, concentration problems, change in physical activity, pinpoint pupils, appetite changes	Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, constipation, dizziness, drowsiness, headache, swelling, unconsciousness	Nausea, constipation, confusion

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Oxycodone HCL Hydrocodone bitartrate w/ acetaminophen Barbiturates

WHAT IS IT?	Oxycodone HCL is a prescription pain reliever that may be prescribed to relieve moderate to severe pain. It can be combined with other medications, including acetaminophen and ibuprofen.	Hydrocodone bitartrate is a prescription medication often combined with acetaminophen (which increases the effect of the hydrocodone) to relieve moderate to severe pain. In the United States there are over 200 products containing hydrocodone with acetaminophen (Vicodin, Lortab). Hydrocodone is also combined with aspirin (Lortab ASA), ibuprofen (Vicoprofen) and antihistamines (Hycomine).	Barbiturates are central nervous system depressants that slow down the mind and body, causing drowsiness and sleepiness.
BRAND COMMERCIAL NAMES	OxyContin®, Percocet®, Tylox®, Roxicodone®, Roxicet®, Opana	Hocodan®, Lorcet®, Lortab®, Vicodin®, Vicoprofen®, Tussionex®, Norco®	Amytal®, Nembutal®, Seconal®, Phenobarbital, Tuinal
STREET NAMES	Oxy, O/C, Orange Crush, Oscar, Ocean, Blues Clues-Roxi	Vike, Watson-387, Hydro, Tuss	Barbs, Block Busters, Christmas Trees, Golf Balls, Pinks, Reds, Red Birds, Red Devils, Reds and Blues, Phennies, Tooies, Yellows, Yellow Jackets
LOOKS LIKE	Tablets, Liquid, Powder, Patch	Tablets, Liquid	Multi-colored tablets and capsules
HOW IT IS USED	Swallowed, Snorted, Injected, Rectally	Swallowed	Injected, Swallowed
DANGEROUS BECAUSE	Abuse of Oxycodone can result in severe respiratory depression and death.	Serious side effects include: Sedation, respiratory depression and arrest, unconsciousness, coma, death	Higher doses cause irritability, paranoia, suicidal thoughts, unusual excitement, fever, life-threatening withdrawal, impaired memory, judgment and coordination.
TEENS USAGE	1 in 6 teens has abused a prescription pain reliever.	1 in 6 teens has abused a prescription pain reliever.	Among 12th graders, 1 in 11 has abused sedatives and tranquilizers.
IMPORTANT TO KNOW	Twenty percent of teens report buying pain relievers from a friend or relative or taking the drug from a friend or relative without asking (Rx report from Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2007). Seventy percent of teens who used prescription pain relievers non-medically reported obtaining them from a friend or relative, either for free, purchased or by taking them without asking.	Most teens get their prescription drugs from their own family's medicine cabinet. Fifty-three percent of teens agree it is easy to get prescription drugs from their parents' medicine cabinets	Barbiturates mimic alcohol intoxication, causing mild euphoria, relief of anxiety and sleepiness. Abuse can lead to physical dependence and barbiturate withdrawal can be life-threatening.
SIGNS OF ABUSE	Constipation, nausea, sedation, dizziness, vomiting, headache, dry mouth, sweating, weakness, mental clouding, pinpoint pupils	Nausea, constipation, confusion, euphoria, mental clouding, changes in sleep (increase when using, insomnia/irritability when withdrawing), acting as if in "stupor," pinpoint pupils, problems with academics/extra-curricular activities.	Slurred speech, shallow breathing, sluggishness, fatigue, disorientation, lack of coordination, dilated pupils

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Benzodiazepines

Flunitrazepam

Amphetamine

WHAT IS IT?	Benzodiazepines are among the most commonly prescribed depressant medications in the United States today. More than 15 different types of benzodiazepine medications exist. They are prescribed for relaxation, calmness, and relief from anxiety and tension. Some benzodiazepines are used to treat seizures or insomnia or other conditions.	Flunitrazepam may be prescribed to treat insomnia or given prior to anesthesia. It is a derivative of Benzodiazepine. It is not available in the United States but is available in 60 other countries.	It is a stimulant because it mimics the effect adrenaline has on the body. Amphetamines may be prescribed for the treatment of ADHD and a sleep disorder called narcolepsy.
BRAND COMMERCIAL NAMES	Ativan®, Halcion®, Librium®, Valium®, Xanax®	Rohypnol	Biphentamine, Dexedrine®, Adderall®, Concerta®
STREET NAMES	Sticks, BenZ, Footballs, Bars, French Fries, Ladders	R-2, Mexican Valium, Rophies, Roofies, Circle	Bennies, Black Beauties, Crosses, Hearts, LA Turnaround, Speed, Truck Drivers, Uppers, Addies, A Train
LOOKS LIKE	Tablets, Liquid	Tablets (small olive green, oblong tablet featuring the number 542)	Tablets, Capsules, Powder
HOW IT IS USED	Injected, Swallowed	Swallowed, Crushed, Snorted	Injected, Swallowed, Snorted
DANGEROUS BECAUSE	Side effects of abusing benzodiazepines include: Impaired motor coordination, drowsiness, lethargy, fatigue, impaired thinking and memory, confusion, depression, altered vision, slurred speech, stuttering, vertigo, tremors, respiratory depression, nausea, constipation, dry mouth, abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea.	Side effects of abusing flunitrazepam include: Impaired motor coordination, drowsiness, lethargy, fatigue, impaired thinking and memory, anterior grade amnesia, nausea, constipation, dry mouth, abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea.	Can cause rapid or irregular heartbeat, delirium, panic, psychosis and heart failure.
TEENS USAGE	Among 12th graders, 1 in 11 has abused sedatives and tranquilizers.	Among 12th graders, 1 in 11 has abused sedatives and tranquilizers.	1 in 10 teens has abused Adderall or Ritalin.
IMPORTANT TO KNOW	Abusing sedatives with alcohol can slow both the heart rate and respiration and possibly lead to death. Abuse can lead to physical and psychological dependency with serious withdrawal symptoms, including sweating, tremor, vomiting, anxiety, insomnia and muscle pain.	Rohypnol has become infamous for being known as the “date rape drug,” due to its ability to be easily and surreptitiously mixed into liquids and fast acting side effects, coupled with short term memory loss. Abusing sedatives with alcohol can slow both the heart rate and respiration and possibly lead to death.	Teens (Ages 12-17) who abuse stimulants are more likely to engage in other delinquent behavior such as fighting or selling drugs. Teens (Ages 12-17) who abuse prescription stimulants are more likely to experience a major depressive episode.
SIGNS OF ABUSE	Long-term effects of benzodiazepines include: Slowed reflexes, mood swings, hostile and erratic behavior, euphoria, disorientation, confusion, slurred speech, muscle weakness, lack of coordination, impaired thinking, memory and judgment.	Slowed reflexes, long periods of sleep or drowsiness, memory loss, disorientation, confusion, slurred speech, muscle weakness, lack of coordination, impaired thinking, memory, and judgment	Reduced appetite, weight loss, nervousness, insomnia, aggressiveness, impulsive behavior, dilated pupils (can't see eye color), high body temperature.

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Methylphenidate



Dextromethorphan (DXM)



WHAT IS IT?	Methylphenidate is the most commonly prescribed central nervous stimulant use to treat ADHD. It may also be used to treat a sleep disorder called narcolepsy.	Dextromethorphan (DXM) is an ingredient found in any cold medicine with the “DM” or “TUSS” in the title or name. In fact, DXM is in almost half of all of the OTC drugs sold in the United States, making it easy to get, cheap, and legal.
BRAND COMMERCIAL NAMES	Ritalin®	Any Cold Medicine with “DM” or “TUSS” in the title such as: Dimetapp DM®, Nyquil®, Robitussin®, Theraflu®, Vick’s Formula 44®
STREET NAMES	JIF, MPH, R-ball, Skippy, The Smart Drug, Vitamin R	Orange Crush, Triple C’s, C-C-C, Red Devils, Skittles, Dex, Vitamin D, Robo, Robo-trippin, Robo-dosing
LOOKS LIKE	Tablets	Cough medicine sold over the counter in drug stores and general stores
HOW IT IS USED	Injected, Swallowed, Snorted	Swallowed, Snorted
DANGEROUS BECAUSE	Increased blood pressure, heart rate and body temperature; feelings of hostility and paranoia; serious cardiovascular complications, including stroke, dilated pupils	Serious side effects include: Nausea, loss of coordination, headache, vomiting, loss of consciousness, numbness of fingers and toes, abdominal pain, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, seizures, panic attacks, psychosis, brain damage, addiction, insomnia, coma, death
TEENS USAGE	1 in 10 teens has abused Adderall or Ritalin	1 in 8 teens has abused cough medicine to get high.
IMPORTANT TO KNOW	Many teens abuse prescribed stimulant medication to help them cram for exams or suppress their appetite.	Only 48 percent of teens strongly agree that taking cough medicine to get high is risky.
SIGNS OF ABUSE	Decreased sleep and appetite, increased alertness, attention span, energy	Nausea, loss of coordination, headache, vomiting, slurred speech, disassociation