



## Prescription Drug Abuse: Be a Part of the Solution

Prescription medications are being abused at a rate second only to marijuana. In fact, excluding marijuana, the rate of prescription drug abuse is higher than all other drugs of abuse *combined* including cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine. It is because of this high rate of abuse that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified prescription drug abuse as an epidemic.

Almost 70% of Americans take at least one prescription medication; 20% take five or more. When drugs such as Percocet®, OxyContin® and Adderall® are used as directed, people can enjoy a better quality of life due to the positive effects these and other prescribed medications have on their overall health. But when used incorrectly, these same drugs can cause a multitude of health and social problems – including addiction and accidental overdose death.

Unfortunately, the incorrect use of a prescription medication is more common than you might think:

- 50% of prescription drugs are misused
- 33% of U.S. citizens have used prescription drugs non-medically at least once in their life

Problems associated with the misuse and abuse of prescription medications can happen to *anyone* and impact all layers of our country – from individuals, to their friends and family members, and even their workplaces. The abuse of prescription painkillers alone costs employers \$42 billion annually in lost productivity. And that's not even counting its impact on insurance and workers' compensation claims. These costs are generally passed to you – the employee and taxpayer – through higher insurance premiums and tax rates.

The good news is that prescription drug misuse and abuse is preventable. There are five steps everyone can take to become safer consumers of prescription drugs:

1. **Talk to your doctor:** You have a right and a responsibility to ask questions about your health care, especially as it relates to prescription medications. While the doctor is the medical expert, you are the expert on your body and overall health.
2. **Talk to your pharmacist:** Pharmacists are highly trained and the most qualified professionals to answer questions about medications and their interactions – including over-the-counter drugs and supplements. They are trained to educate you about your medications and help monitor how they are working.
3. **Use medications as directed:** Approximately 125,000 people in the U.S. die each year because they don't take their medication as directed. This number doesn't include those who suffer from other consequences of misusing or abusing a medication such as addiction and death caused by accidental overdose.
4. **Avoid sharing medications:** There are both health and legal consequences to sharing medication. Not being a doctor, you don't know *exactly* how that medication will impact others. Also, sharing any type of prescription medication with another person is a class E-federal offense, punishable by prison time and/or substantial fines. Carefully store your medication to avoid accidentally "sharing."
5. **Dispose of medication properly:** Over 50% of people who abuse drugs get them from a friend or family member *for free*. It is good practice to dispose of any expired and/or unused prescription medications at a pharmaceutical take-back location. Visit [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) for information on how to dispose of unused medications.

Just as anyone can become addicted to prescription drugs, anyone can also take positive steps to prevent prescription drug abuse. Visit the [GenerationRxWorkplace.com](http://GenerationRxWorkplace.com) to learn more about your relationship with Rx drugs and take advantage of free resources including an online course, fact sheets, lists of helping resources and other downloadable materials.