

**SPOTLIGHT ON ADDERALL**

Did you know that according to a recent national study, 11% of all teens aged 13 to 17 have been prescribed stimulant medication like Adderall or Ritalin for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)? That’s a lot of medication floating around, and for those who need it, these drugs can be extremely effective.

But according to a 2012 survey by The Partnership at Drugfree.org, in conjunction with the MetLife Foundation, an additional one in eight teens (13%) now reports that they have taken one of these stimulants when it was *not* prescribed for them. At BHS, 12% of all seniors admitted to abusing amphetamines not prescribed to them. Reasons ranged from self-medication and weight loss to study aids and recreational use – the sustained “high” from stimulants allows students to party longer.

Most commonly, however, students use these stimulants as “study drugs,” for time management issues and to stay awake and enhance focus when cramming for exams, finishing papers or taking tests, even the SATs. Twenty-six percent of teens believe this is a valid use for these prescription drugs, whether prescribed or not, and many believe their parents won’t care if they get caught. In fact, nearly one-third of parents nationally say they also believe these drugs can improve a teen’s academic performance -- even if the teen does not have ADHD. Swayed by the pervasive culture of intense academic pressure and competition, some push their child’s doctor for a prescription for the “wonder drug” as a chemical advantage, a “good grade pill.” Others are simply unaware that their children are illicitly taking stimulants, as the outward effects of this kind of drug abuse are relatively subtle. According to Steve Pasierb, president and CEO at the Partnership organization, the heart of the problem is that teens as well as their parents tend to believe that prescription drugs by their very nature are a safer, more easily controlled alternative to illegal street drugs.

**How exactly do these drugs work?**

According to the Drug Enforcement Agency, ADHD stimulants like Adderall (also called dextroamphetamine and Dexedrine) and Ritalin (methylphenidate) increase the amount of norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain. Also referred to as the smart drug, speed, Skippy, uppers, roses or hearts, these drugs increase blood pressure, heart rate, and blood glucose, opens up the pathways of the respiratory system, and constricts blood vessels. Surface effects can feel like increased alertness, attention, and energy, along with a sense of euphoria.

However, with these serious changes in the body, ADHD drugs also can cause cardiovascular failure (heart attack) and lethal seizures. Taking high doses of a stimulant may result in dangerously high body temperatures and an irregular heartbeat. Abuse can also lead to mood swings, depression and sleep issues. Taking high doses repeatedly over a short time can prompt feelings of hostility or paranoia. Long-term, stimulants can be addictive and lead to compulsive use -- as the brain makes chemical adjustments, it takes more and more of the stimulant to achieve an intended effect. For some teens, stimulants can be the gateway to abusing other drugs, such as painkillers.

All of these issues point to why it is so important to be under a doctor’s care when taking ADHD meds. Doctors who prescribe stimulants like Adderall and Ritalin for ADHD know that getting just the right chemical combination and dosage is often an extremely tricky process and not to be taken lightly. Adderall can also have an adverse affect in combination with other medications, even some over-the-counter decongestants and antacids. Students who casually pop a pill or snort the powder run the risk of dangerous unintended side-effects.

**So where do teens get these drugs?**

ADHD meds can be bought easily on the internet, but the majority of students say they access these drugs from their classmates, friends and family members for whom the medications are prescribed. Some teens who are prescribed ADHD meds don’t like the way they make them feel or only take their meds during the week, saving extras for a lucrative little sideline selling pills to classmates. And some students have been known to fake ADHD symptoms in order to procure a prescription from their doctor that they use only periodically, leaving a hefty stash for redistribution.

**What Can Parents Do?**

With this troubling trend clearly on the rise, it’s important to be aware and talk your teen about these popular prescription drugs. Encourage your teen not to pressure friends with ADHD to share their medications – what is carefully prescribed for one child can have a very different, often dangerous, effect on another. And if your child takes these drugs under a doctor’s supervision, keep track of usage and make sure he/she doesn’t share them with friends. Kids with ADHD are often pressured to sell their medication to others, which is not only unsafe, but illegal –ADHD medsare a Class 2 controlled substance (like cocaine and morphine) because they rank among the most addictive of medications, and selling them is a felony.

[Click here](http://www.b-pen.org/mental-health-stress-anxiety-depression.html) to find information on positive, non-chemical ways to manage time, study effectively and handle stress.

Additional resources:

[The Risky Rise of the Good-Grade Pill](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/10/education/seeking-academic-edge-teenagers-abuse-stimulants.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/10/education/seeking-academic-edge-teenagers-abuse-stimulants.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>)

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

[DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) http://www.justice.gov/dea/](http://www.justice.gov/dea/)
[NFP (National Family Partnership) http://www.nfp.org/](http://www.nfp.org/)

<http://www.doctoroz.com/episode/deadly-adderall-abuse>

[www.Projectknow.com](http://www.Projectknow.com)