

Prescription/Over the Counter Drugs

Prescription Drugs

What prescription drugs can a person become addicted to?

There are many prescription drugs that can be abused; the most commonly abused tend to be:

- Opiates – often prescribed to treat pain e.g. codeine
- Central nervous system depressants, which are used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders e.g. barbiturates (although rarely prescribed now) and much more commonly benzodiazepines such as diazepam and temazepam.
- Antidepressants e.g. citalopram and mirtazapine
- Antihistamines e.g. chlorphenamine
- Stimulants used to treat ADHD such as dexamphetamine

When do you classify usage as addiction?

When a person becomes physically and/or psychologically dependent, although not all drugs are capable of inducing a physical dependency.

Dependency is characterised by a feeling of not being able to do without a drug and a desperate need to obtain and consume the drug to alleviate feelings that arise from not having it. Other symptoms are listed below.

What are the signs to look for in yourself and others?

These may include:

- Needing to take more of the drug to get an appropriate effect
- Asking for repeat prescriptions early
- Difficulty in trying to cut down or stop drug use
- Feeling guilty about the drug use
- Problems with work, finance or legal issues
- Being secretive about the drug use
- Arguments or disagreements with significant others about the drug use
- Taking other medications to alleviate side effects of prescription drugs

- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when stopping/reducing the drug or between doses
- Continuing to take the drug despite actual or likely negative consequences

What are the dangers of prescription drugs?

These are many and varied and depend on the type and dose of the drug. There are the risks involved with the short term effects and with prolonged use.

They include:

- Sedation – usually associated with short term use
- Lack of coordination – again usually short term
- Altered state of consciousness – more likely in short term
- Gastrointestinal complaints, such as nausea (short term) and diarrhoea (short term) and constipation (long term)
- Depressed respiration – high doses, acute
- Changes in blood pressure or heart rate – short and long term
- Changes in appetite – more likely in short term
- Interactions with other drugs and alcohol – short and long term
- Tolerance and dependence – long term
- Symptoms associated with withdrawal – longer term (again differing with each drug) these may include anxiety, depression, seizures, tremor and insomnia

What to do when you have recognised a problem:

In yourself

- Let someone or others you trust know that you have a problem. Don't delay and be honest about the degree of the problem.
- Let your GP know.
- Ask them to help you find competent help.
- Engage in an appropriate treatment programme.

In someone else

- Contact Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs Helpline (free phone 08080 101011 or email helpline@sfad.org.uk) who can provide you with details of local support services.
- Offer to help to find help for them. This information can be sourced from Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs and can be passed to the person needing help.
- Give honest, straightforward feedback in a caring way.

- Offer ongoing support.
- Trust your instincts. Don't be put off but remember you cannot make someone change.

Over the counter drugs

What over the counter drugs can people become addicted to?

These are mainly codeine based analgesics such as:

- Ibuprofen & Codeine (Nurofen Plus)
- Paracetamol & Codeine (Solpadine)
- Some cough medicines also contain codeine (Benylin)

When do you classify usage as addiction?

Codeine, if taken regularly over a period of time can produce a physical dependence that will result in withdrawal symptoms if ceased. In addition it is possible to create a psychological dependence for example when the drug is seen as a coping strategy to lower anxiety. A characteristic of addiction is that the awareness of the excessive and continued use actually increases anxiety. What are the signs to look out for in yourself/others?

Deviating from the recommended dose and using the drug without symptoms present. Continuing to increase the dose over a period of time. Keeping the use of the tablets secret from others. Visiting several different pharmacies from which you buy the drug (as 32 is the maximum individual purchase).

What are the dangers of over the counter drugs?

Potential for physical damage to the digestive system, liver and kidneys.

What to do when you accept there is a problem in you/other:

Talk about it; to your family or trusted friends and seek help from a doctor.