

Prescription Stimulant & Psychostimulant Drug Abuse

Why are stimulants abused?

Stimulants have been abused for both “performance enhancement” (e.g., to stay up all night cramming for an exam or to improve memory).

How are stimulants abused?

Tablets can be swallowed, opened or crushed with the contents dissolved in water and then injected into a vein. The contents can also be snorted.

How do these drugs affect the brain?

Taken in doses and routes other than those prescribed, stimulants can increase the dopamine in the brain very quickly, disrupting normal communication between brain cells, producing euphoria, and increasing the risk of addiction.

- Psychostimulants include both illicit drugs, such as methamphetamine or ecstasy, and prescription stimulants.
- Prescription stimulants are medications used to treat conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or depression.
- Rates of overdose deaths from stimulants has been increasing since 2010.
- Nearly 23% of all drug overdose deaths in 2019 involved psychostimulants.
- There are varying degrees of withdrawal symptoms after chronic stimulant abuse. Some symptoms that can occur upon stopping are depression, sleep problems, and fatigue.
- The misconception that prescription medications are safer than illicit drugs helps the increase in misuse.
- Psychostimulants can be misused and are considered to be addictive. Approximately 5 million Americans misused prescription stimulants in 2020.
- Emergency Room visits due to non-fatal drug overdoses involving opioids and amphetamines (stimulants) increased from 2018-2019.
- Taking high doses of a stimulant can cause an irregular heartbeat, dangerously high body temperatures, and the potential for heart failure or seizures. Repeated misuse of stimulants can lead to psychosis, anger or paranoia.

