

Use As Directed: Preventing Prescription Drug Overdoses

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Each year millions of people use prescription medications safely to help treat and cure illnesses as well as prevent further disease complications. While most prescriptions are used as directed, there are a growing number of cases of misuse of prescription drugs.

Prescription drug overdose is the cause of 114 deaths daily in the United States. Approximately 82 percent of these deaths are accidental. In addition 6,748 patients present to the emergency department every day for the misuse of prescription drugs.*

In 2011, deaths due to prescription drug overdoses exceeded those caused by car accidents and continue to increase today. Indiana has the 17th highest drug overdose mortality rate in the United States.*



Common Prescription Drugs Involved in Overdoses

The prescription drugs in the chart below contribute to more deaths than street drugs such as cocaine and heroin. The majority of the deaths from use of prescription drugs happen by accident.

Type	Used to Treat	Examples of Prescriptions [generic name (trade name)]
Opioids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pain relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oxycodone (Roxicodone®, Oxycontin®) • methadone (Dolophine®, Amidone®) • morphine (Avinza®)
Benzodiazepines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anxiety • panic attacks • insomnia • depression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alprazolam (Xanax®) • diazepam (Valium®) • lorazepam (Ativan®)
Amphetamine-like substances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder • narcolepsy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amphetamine/dextroamphetamine (Adderall®) • methylphenidate (Ritalin®)

* Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Tips to Prevent Accidental Prescription Drug Overdoses

There are risks of harm if prescription medications are not used as prescribed by the doctor. This applies to medications we use ourselves and those we give to our loved ones. Use the following tips to help prevent accidental overdoses of prescription medications.

- Always read the label on the prescription bottle. Never take more medicine than the doctor has directed.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before mixing medications. Some medications can have harmful interactions with other medications or foods. This can include over-the-counter medications such as aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol®), or medications for heartburn.
- If you are using a liquid medication, use the measuring tool provided by the pharmacy. Do not use silverware or dosing devices intended for other medications.
- Know a child's weight when giving over-the-counter medications along with prescription medications. Call a medical professional if you have any questions about how much to give to a child.
- Store all medications in a safe place away from children and pets.
- If your pain does not go away with medication, contact your physician right away. Do not take more medication than stated on the directions.
- Use medication boxes to organize daily medications. This will help prevent taking more than the prescribed amount of medication.



- Do not mix alcohol with prescription pain pills, anxiety medications, acetaminophen (Tylenol®), or medications for attention-deficit disorder.
- Do not share prescription medications with anyone. Only take medication that is prescribed to you by your doctor.

Signs and Symptoms of a Prescription Drug Overdose

It is important to know the signs and symptoms that someone has taken too much medication and who to call for help.

Symptoms can vary depending on the prescription drug an individual has used. Some prescription drugs can slow down our body, while others can speed it up. The most common signs and symptoms of prescription drug overdose include:

- abnormal pupil size (significant constriction or dilation)
- difficulty breathing
- unconsciousness
- hallucinations
- excessive drowsiness
- nausea/vomiting
- excessive sweating
- seizures
- confusion
- unsteadiness

If You Suspect a Drug Overdose . . .

- Call 911 immediately if you suspect that an individual has overdosed on drugs.
- If the individual does not have a pulse, and you are trained to perform basic life support, start CPR.
- Try to determine what medication the individual has ingested.
- Give any prescription medication bottles to the emergency responders.
- If you believe you have accidentally taken too much of your medication, call 911 for help.

More people abuse prescription drugs than cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, and inhalants combined.

Source: Indiana Bitter Pill website, bitterpill.in.gov

Poison Help Line: 1-800-222-1222

- ▶ Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- ▶ Free and confidential service for any questions
- ▶ Serves all of the United States and many territories
- ▶ Provides translation services in 161 languages

Sources

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3. Bitter Pill website. Indiana Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Task Force. Office of the Indiana Attorney General. Available at: www.in.gov/bitterpill/index.html. Accessed 22 August 2014.
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