



NOT SUCH A CHILL PILL

The Truth About Prescription Drugs

Stephanie, Peter and Bryan were excited about summer. The teens were about to enter their senior year at Moorestown High in Pennsylvania, but not before a big trip to the beach to celebrate. They were going to Ocean City and couldn't wait to play on the beach and lay in the sun.

On their first night there, Stephanie called an ambulance, frantically reporting that one of her friends was unconscious in the hotel bathroom. When the paramedics arrived, they found Peter dead.

Peter couldn't wait to be a senior, but he died before he even had a chance to graduate high school. A trip to the beach turned into a deadly vacation when Bryan started giving his friends prescription painkillers that he found in his mom's medicine cabinet. Peter's body couldn't handle the high dosage and he died of a drug overdose.

Right after the cause of death was determined, Bryan was put in handcuffs and led to jail. Bryan gave Peter a drug that killed him, which made him legally responsible. He was charged with manslaughter.

SAYING "NO" TO PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Remember, if a doctor prescribed medication to someone else, it is illegal and dangerous for you to take them - just like street drugs. So, if someone offers you one of their pills, just say "No."

Or try something like this:

- "No thanks. I feel better without that stuff."
- "I hate swallowing pills."
- "Nah, I have better things to do."

THE PILL QUIZ

Test your knowledge about prescription drugs by completing each sentence.

1. Abusing ____ is as addictive as abusing heroin.
2. Painkillers, stimulants and ____ are the most commonly abused prescription drugs.
3. The only person who can tell you to use a prescription drug is a ____.
4. ____ cause you to become disoriented and tired.
5. Taking a drug without a prescription is ____.

Answers: 1. Painkillers; 2. Sedatives; 3. Doctor; 4. Sedatives; 5. Illegal.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS



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NOT WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

DAINGEROUS DOSES

A Prescription Drug is Still a Drug

Prescription drugs can be very addictive - users can actually become dependent after just a few doses. They alter your consciousness and can cause painful withdrawal symptoms when you stop using. Many teens think that trying them once won't be a big deal, but some of those users end up sick, addicted, or in the hospital.

The worst part is, they don't originally come from dealers. Prescription drugs come from a trusted professional. They are safe when used as directed. But when they're abused, prescription drugs become addictive, dangerous and can even be as deadly as hard drugs like heroin and cocaine.

GAMBLING WITH YOUR HEALTH

You might think that you know what you're getting when you take a prescription drug, but if your name isn't on the medication label, then you don't need the drug inside the bottle. You have no idea how someone else's prescription will affect your body. The results might be deadly.

DEADLY COMBINATION

If you abuse a prescription drug and other drugs or alcohol at the same time, the combination can have a very negative effect on your body. For example, combining two stimulants can double their effects and cause a heart attack. Also, many prescription drugs can't be mixed with alcohol, or they can become lethal.



PRESCRIBED FOR PAIN . . .

. . . and Killing Your Brain

Many people need prescription painkillers: cancer patients, surgery patients and those who suffer from chronic pain. Doctors prescribe drugs like OxyContin, Codeine, Percocet and Vicodin to those who need them. But the same drugs that ease suffering for some, are abused by others. When abused, these drugs can have some scary side effects.

Painkillers share the same chemical structure as heroin, so they have similar effects on the body. Both drugs force your brain to release dopamine - a hormone that you usually produce when you're doing something fun. This feeling is very addictive for heroin junkies and prescription painkiller users.

The trouble starts when you get dependent on the dopamine. Once you're hooked, you have to take more and more painkillers to get high. Even worse, your brain might stop making dopamine naturally, so you'll have to take painkillers just to feel happy at all.

Other nasty side effects of abusing painkillers include:

- Slower breathing and heart rate
- Withdrawal symptoms, including insomnia, diarrhea and vomiting
- Death

WHY STIMULANTS CAN HURT YOU

Stimulants are often prescribed for people who suffer from chronic fatigue or who have trouble staying alert - for example, you might have classmates who take prescription Ritalin or Adderall to treat their ADHD and help them succeed in school. Taking these drugs when you don't need them, though, can be very dangerous.

Stimulants help you focus, so some high school and college students abuse them because they think they'll help them concentrate while studying. Instead, these students can end up suffering from some intense side effects, including:

- Paranoia
- Heart attacks
- Seizures
- Death



A BIG DOWNER

Sedatives and Their Side Effects

Doctors prescribe sedatives to people who suffer from anxiety, panic attacks, or insomnia. Prescription drugs like Xanax or Valium relax the body, helping these patients stay calm or go to sleep. When people abuse sedatives, they're usually hoping to feel relaxed or euphoric.

Instead, sedatives work by slowing the brain down, causing abusers to feel uncoordinated and disoriented.

Abusing prescription sedatives can have these side effects as well:

- Paranoia
- Suicidal thoughts
- Impaired judgment
- Seizures
- Addiction
- Death

SELF-MEDICATING AND THE LAW

You know that prescription drugs can be addictive, have a long list of terrible side effects and can even kill you. So why would anyone want to take them?

Some people say that it's the stress from school, family or peers that causes them to start abusing prescription drugs. When they take a prescription drug that doesn't belong to them, they're "self-medicating." Self-medicating isn't just bad for your body, it's also against the law. Buying, selling, or giving away prescription drugs are illegal, too.