



Since a young person’s brain is still developing, their brains are particularly vulnerable to the addictive nature of pain and anti-anxiety medications. Here are some steps you can take to help protect them.

LEARN WHAT KINDS OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ARE MOST COMMONLY ABUSED.

Prescription drugs most commonly abused – opioid pain relievers (Oxycodone, Vicodin or Norco), stimulants (Adderall or Ritalin), and anti-anxiety medications (Xanax or Valium) – affect the brain and can change the way it works. Drugs can change the reward system, making it more difficult for young people to feel good without taking them. These medications may lead to physical dependence and addiction.

Over-the-counter drugs like dextromethorphan, the active ingredient in cough syrup, can also be misused and is dangerous in large doses.

DISCUSS THE RISKS AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS WITH YOUR TEEN.

Let your teen know that although they are prescribed by a doctor and appear to be safe, all medications can be dangerous if used incorrectly – including over-the-counter medications. Explain that a young person’s brain is more vulnerable to the addictive nature of these medications.

KEEP TRACK OF THE DOSE AND TIME THE MEDICATIONS ARE TAKEN.

It is best that a supervising adult dispense medication and keep a record of doses and timing. The effects of the medication may make this difficult for the person using them and it ensures that your teen is taking the medication as prescribed.

KEEP MEDICATIONS SECURE.

Store painkillers and other medications prone to misuse in a secure location reducing the chance that others may accidentally take or misuse the medication. It is a good practice to periodically check to make sure no pills are missing.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL ABOUT PAIN MEDICATIONS.

Teen addictions can start after being prescribed a pain medication for a sports-related injury or oral surgery. Discuss pain management options with your health care provider. Let your provider know if there is a history of addiction with your child or other family members.

- › Are other non-narcotic options available?
- › Can the prescription be written for a smaller quantity of medication?
- › Exactly how should the medication be taken? For example, does four times a day mean every six hours - which would require waking up to take medications during the night. Or, does it mean four times a day during normal waking hours, which is usually about every four hours? What is the maximum dose in a 24 hour period?
- › Are there any drugs that can interact with the painkillers, such as allergy medication, medication for skin conditions, alcohol, etc.?
- › Should the pill be taken even if your teen isn’t feeling a lot of pain or discomfort or if the pain is intermittent?
- › When should the painkillers be slowly decreased or stopped? If so, what is the best way to do this?

Check with your medical professional or pharmacist if you have additional questions.

DISPOSE OF UNUSED PRESCRIPTIONS AS SOON AS THEY ARE NO LONGER NEEDED.

Many communities have medication drop boxes for the safe and anonymous disposal of unused medications. For location and hours go to www.rxdrugdropbox.org. In Orange County, California, you can dispose of medications safely in your trash by mixing with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, kitty litter or used coffee grounds and placing it in a sealed container such as a plastic bag. Throw the container in your household trash. **Do NOT flush medications down the toilet or drain.**