

## **Addiction to prescription drugs**

Many people associate drug abuse with illegal drugs such as cocaine or heroin. But addiction is far more common with prescription medications such as sleeping pills and tranquilizers. Drug dependence, which can be psychological or physical, is an uncontrollable desire to experience the pleasurable effects of a drug or to prevent the unpleasant effects of withdrawal.

Your body can build up a tolerance to a drug so that the dose must be increased to achieve the same results. This effect is called drug tolerance. It is characteristic of most commonly abused drugs, including alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine. Commonly abused prescription and over-the-counter medicines include opioids such as hydrocodone (Vicodin) and oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet), sleep medicines such as zolpidem (Ambien) and eszopiclone (Lunesta), and stimulants such as methylphenidate (Concerta, Ritalin).

When a person becomes physically dependent on a prescription medicine, the body has adapted to the drug's effects so much that stopping it causes withdrawal symptoms. The only way to get free of it is to slowly use less and less, under a doctor's supervision, to prevent severe symptoms of withdrawal.

In a small number of people (particularly those who have addiction problems with other substances), addictive behavior can develop during treatment with narcotics or tranquilizers. In these circumstances, supportive counseling combined with careful monitoring of prescribed dosages may be necessary to prevent addiction.

To avoid becoming addicted to a medication, take it as directed, be aware of the signs of dependency, and use it only for short-term treatment. Talk to your doctor about other methods of treating the underlying problem, and seek counseling if you think you have become addicted to a prescription drug.

**Main Source: Harvard Revue**

