



FOOTHILL-DE ANZA
Community College District

WELLNESS

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

October 2009

This Month's Topic:

Prescription Drug Addiction

Hitting Close to Home

It may not be as talked about as illegal drug abuse. And, it may not be as well-publicized. But, prescription drug addiction can be just as destructive — taking a toll on your health and your relationships. People who abuse medication may hide the addiction or take desperate measures to get a drug. But, there is hope. Knowing the signs of abuse and taking action is an important first step.

Causes...

Did you know that an estimated 20 percent of Americans have taken medication for reasons different than why it's prescribed? There are several possible explanations, including:

- **Medications are legal and prescribed by doctors.** As a result, people may be more likely to think it's OK to take the drugs longer or differently than directed.
- **They may be easier to get.** Some people may lie to a doctor about symptoms to get a prescription. Friends and family may not think twice about sharing pills. And, disreputable Web sites may sell drugs without a prescription.
- **Certain medications can have side effects that are considered desirable.** For example, Adderall®, which is used to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), can decrease appetite. So, people who feel pressure to stay thin may use the drug to lose weight.

...And Effects

Taking any medication without a doctor's supervision is dangerous. Some medications may cause dependence and possibly addiction. If you take a physically addictive medication for a long period of time, your body may build up a tolerance. As a result, you may start to take more pills. This is because you may need more to feel the drug's effects. Then, if you try and stop taking the medication, you may experience withdrawal symptoms. You may need the drug in order to feel "normal."

Being dependent on a drug can cause serious issues:

- Impaired judgment while driving or in other situations
- Neglected responsibilities at work, home or school
- Health problems, including increased blood pressure, heart rate and body temperature, or decreased sleep and appetite
- Destructive behavior such as lying and stealing to get the medication

Signs and Symptoms

It can be hard to recognize a problem with prescription drugs in yourself or a loved one. But, there are some signs you can look for:

- Building greater tolerance
- Experiencing signs of withdrawal
- Having trouble stopping or controlling use
- Taking larger amounts than prescribed
- Using the medication for longer than prescribed
- Spending significant time getting, using and recovering from the drug
- Missing important work or social events
- Continuing use despite knowing there's a problem

Treatment

It's very important that people who have an addiction get help. The most common option is outpatient treatment. This may include one-to-one or group therapy sessions with a mental health professional. Depending on the situation, some treatments also include medication. Sometimes, inpatient treatment may be required.

If you believe someone you know has a problem with prescription medication, talk with him or her. However, be prepared for excuses or denial. Many people with addictions don't believe there's anything wrong. A doctor, counselor or other professional can give you tips to start your conversation. United Behavioral Health is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

Use as Directed

Always take your medication exactly as your doctor prescribes. These tips can help:

- Follow directions carefully.
- Don't increase or decrease doses without talking with your doctor.
- Don't stop taking medication on your own.
- Don't crush or break pills.
- Understand the drug's effects on driving and other daily tasks.
- Learn about the drug's potential interactions with alcohol and other prescription or over-the-counter medications.
- Tell your doctor about any past history of substance abuse.
- Don't use other people's prescription medications and don't share yours.

Older Adults and Prescription Drug Problems

Surprisingly, men and women ages 65 and older are one of the largest groups of prescription drug abusers. Taking several medications may cause confusion when it comes to following directions. This increases the chances that a prescription will be taken incorrectly.

Many of us are caring for an aging parent. So, it's important to know the symptoms of prescription drug abuse specific to older adults. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says to look for these signs:

- Excessive worrying about whether pills are working or if there are enough of them
- Complaining about a doctor who won't write a prescription or increase the dosage of a particular drug
- Self-medicating by increasing doses of drugs that "aren't working anymore"
- Withdrawing from family and friends or not participating in activities
- Changing sleep or personal grooming habits
- Contact your loved one's doctor if you recognize any of these symptoms.

Resources:

Use the search phrase "prescription drugs" to learn more about taking medications safely.

Use the search phrase "drug abuse" to learn more about inappropriate use of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): United Behavioral Health (UBH)

Toll-free number: 1-866-248-4105 (7 days/24 hours)

Access code: 61570

www.liveandworkwell.com

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