

NIDA NEWS


[HOME](#) [ABOUT NIDA](#) [NEWS](#) [MEETINGS & EVENTS](#) [FUNDING](#) [PUBLICATIONS](#)
[MEDICAL & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS](#)
[RESEARCHERS](#)
[PARENTS & TEACHERS](#)
[STUDENTS & YOUNG ADULTS](#)
[EN ESPAÑOL](#)
 [SEARCH](#)
[NIDA Home](#) > [Publications](#) > [Research Reports](#)

Research Report Series - Prescription Drugs: Abuse and Addiction

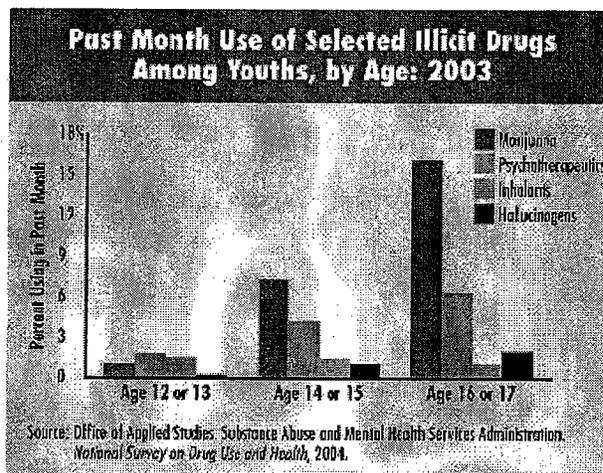
Trends in prescription drug abuse

Although prescription drug abuse affects many Americans, some concerning trends can be seen among older adults, adolescents, and women. Several indicators suggest that prescription drug abuse is on the rise in the United States. According to the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an estimated 4.7 million Americans used prescription drugs nonmedically for the first time in 2002 -

- 2.5 million used pain relievers
- 1.2 million used tranquilizers
- 761,000 used stimulants
- 225,000 used sedatives

Pain reliever incidence increased—from 573,000 initiates in 1990 to 2.5 million initiates in 2000—and has remained stable through 2003. In 2002, more than half (55 percent) of the new users were females, and more than half (56 percent) were ages 18 or older.

The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), which monitors medications and illicit drugs reported in emergency departments (EDs) across the Nation, recently found that two of the most frequently reported prescription medications in drug abuse-related cases are benzodiazepines (e.g., diazepam, alprazolam, clonazepam, and lorazepam) and opioid pain relievers (e.g., oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, methadone, and combinations that include these drugs). In 2002, benzodiazepines accounted for 100,784 mentions that were classified as drug abuse cases, and opioid pain relievers accounted for more than 119,000 ED mentions. From 1994 to 2002, ED mentions of hydrocodone and oxycodone increased by 170 percent and 450 percent, respectively. While ED visits attributed to drug addiction and drug-taking for psychoactive effects have been increasing, intentional overdose visits have remained stable since 1995.



Index

[Letter from the Director](#)
[What are some of the commonly abused prescription drugs?](#)

Opioids

- [What are opioids?](#)
- [How do opioids affect the brain and body?](#)
- [What are the possible consequences of opioid use and abuse?](#)
- [Is it safe to use opioid drugs with other medications?](#)

CNS depressants

- [What are CNS depressants?](#)
- [How do CNS depressants affect the brain and body?](#)
- [What are the possible consequences of CNS depressant use and abuse?](#)
- [Is it safe to use CNS depressants with other medications?](#)

Stimulants

- [What are stimulants?](#)
- [How do stimulants affect the brain and body?](#)
- [What are the possible consequences of stimulant use and abuse?](#)
- [Is it safe to use stimulants with other medications?](#)

[Trends in prescription drug abuse](#)

Studies suggest that women are more likely than men to be prescribed an abusable prescription drug, particularly narcotics and antianxiety drugs—in some cases, 55 percent more likely.

Overall, men and women have roughly similar rates of nonmedical use of prescription drugs. An exception is found among 12- to 17-year-olds. In this age group, young women are more likely than young men to use psychotherapeutic drugs nonmedically. In addition, research has shown that women are at increased risk for nonmedical use of narcotic analgesics and tranquilizers (e.g., benzodiazepines).

[NIDA Home](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Search](#) | [FAQs](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Privacy](#) | [FOIA \(NIH\)](#) | [Employment](#) | [Print Version](#)



The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is part of the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#), a component of the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#). Questions? See our [Contact Information](#). Last updated on Tuesday, July 22, 2008.

