

# Prescription Painkiller Abuse

Obj. 8.4: Identify causes and effects of the painkiller abuse problem.



Free pills from friends driving painkiller abuse

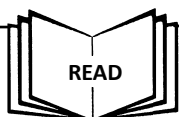
March 4, 2014 (CBS NEWS)

**CHICAGO** -- Most people who abuse addictive prescription painkillers get them for free from friends or relatives, while drug dealers are a relatively uncommon source for those at highest risk for deadly overdoses, a government study found.

People who abuse the most frequently often doctor-shop; more than 1 in 4 who used these drugs almost daily said they had been prescribed by one or more physicians. Almost as many said they got them for free from friends or relatives; only 15 percent of the most frequent abusers said they bought the drugs from dealers or other strangers.

Source: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/free-pills-from-friends-driving-painkiller-abuse-study/>

1. What do you think are some possible consequences of painkiller abuse?
2. What do you think the term “doctor-shop” refers to?
3. What factors might increase a teenager’s likelihood to obtain prescription painkillers from a friend or relative?



## Prescription Painkiller Background

### The role of prescription painkillers:

Although many types of prescription drugs are abused, there is currently a growing, deadly epidemic of prescription painkiller abuse. Nearly three out of four prescription drug overdoses are caused by prescription painkillers—also called opioid pain relievers. The unprecedented rise in overdose deaths in the US parallels a 300% increase since 1999 in the sale of these strong painkillers. (4) These drugs were involved in 14,800 overdose deaths in 2008, more than cocaine and heroin combined. (4)

The misuse and abuse of prescription painkillers was responsible for more than 475,000 emergency department visits in 2009, a number that nearly doubled in just five years. (6)

More than 12 million people reported using prescription painkillers nonmedically in 2010, that is, using them without a prescription or for the feeling they cause. (7)

### How Prescription Painkiller Deaths Occur:

Prescription painkillers work by binding to receptors in the brain to decrease the perception of pain. These powerful drugs can create a feeling of euphoria, cause physical dependence, and, in some people, lead to addiction. Prescription painkillers also cause sedation and slow down a person’s breathing.

A person who is abusing prescription painkillers might take larger doses to achieve a euphoric effect and reduce withdrawal symptoms. These larger doses can cause breathing to slow down so much that breathing stops, resulting in a fatal overdose.

### Who is most at risk:

Understanding the groups at highest risk for overdose can help states target interventions. Research shows that some groups are particularly vulnerable to prescription drug overdose:

- People who obtain multiple controlled substance prescriptions from multiple providers—a practice known as “doctor shopping.” (14,15)
- People who take high daily dosages of prescription painkillers and those who misuse multiple abuse-prone prescription drugs. (15,16,17,18,19)
- Low-income people and those living in rural areas.
  - People on Medicaid are prescribed painkillers at twice the rate of non-Medicaid patients and are at six times the risk of prescription painkillers overdose. (20,21) One Washington State study found that 45% of people who died from prescription painkiller overdoses were Medicaid enrollees. (20)
- People with mental illness and those with a history of substance abuse. (19)

Source: CDC, See “Source List for Lesson 8.3” for complete numbered sources (<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/rxbrief/>)



### The Truth About Painkillers (DrugFreeWorld)

Navigate to: <http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/painkillers.html>

Answer the questions below (for each section of the website) on a separate sheet of paper:

#### PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER ABUSE

1. Why do so many young people choose to get high from prescription painkillers?

#### WHAT ARE PAINKILLERS

2. What are opioids and why are they so addictive?

#### UNDERSTANDING WHY PAINKILLERS BECOME SO ADDICTIVE

3. What is one of the most serious risks of opioids?

#### OXYCONTIN THE “HILLBILLY HEROIN”

4. Why is oxycontin considered the drug of greatest concern to law enforcement agencies in some areas?

#### MENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF PAINKILLERS

5. List them mental and psychological effects of painkiller in order from least to most severe (in your opinion).

#### PAINKILLERS: A SHORT HISTORY

6. In what years did Vicodin, OxyContin, and Percocet come onto the market with FDA approval?

#### WARNING SIGNS OF PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER DEPENDENCY

7. List 3 signs of dependency on prescription painkillers.



**Summarize:**

Describe the prescription painkiller abuse epidemic to someone who has never heard of this problem. In your description, include some causes or risk factors and effects or consequences.



**Painkiller Abuse in the News:**

Find a news article from the last five years describing a case or issue related to prescription painkiller abuse. Summarize the article in the table below:

Question	Information
1. Source information? (Source, Author, Date, URL)	
2. What is the problem?	
3. Who is involved?	
4. What causes or risk factors are mentioned?	
5. What effects or consequences are mentioned?	
6. What possible solutions are discussed?	