

DEBUNKING PRESCRIPTION STIMULANT MYTHS

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**STUDY DRUGS: FACT V. FICTION**

## WHAT ARE STUDY DRUGS?

- ▶ prescription stimulants
- ▶ ADHD medications
  - ▶ Adderall, aka "Addy"
    - ▶ amphetamine
  - ▶ Ritalin, aka "Rids" or "Vitamin R"
    - ▶ methylphenidate



## HOW DO PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS WORK?

- ▶ Stimulants affect the central nervous system, making it produce excess natural brain chemicals (neurotransmitters)
- ▶ This causes changes to a person's mood, alertness and other motor activity
- ▶ **Prescription stimulants have the same effect on all people**, regardless of the person's neurotransmitter levels
  - ▶ Kids with ADHD have low neurotransmitter levels. Stimulants bring these levels up to a normal level.
  - ▶ Kids who don't have ADHD have normal neurotransmitter levels. Stimulants bring these levels above where they should be.

## WHO USES STUDY DRUGS?

- ▶ Kids who have ADHD and a valid medical prescription for the stimulants.
- ▶ Students who don't have ADHD but heard the drugs help them perform better in school.
  - ▶ **Middle school, high school and college students all have been found to use the drugs non-medically.**

## STUDY DRUG SYMPTOMS

- ▶ For kids with ADHD
  - ▶ ADHD makes kids highly distractible. Symptoms\* include struggling to:
    - ▶ Sit still
    - ▶ Listen
    - ▶ Focus

*\* After using stimulants, these symptoms are lessened or disappear.*

- ▶ For kids without ADHD
  - ▶ The “good” symptoms kids want:
    - ▶ Insomnia
    - ▶ Loss of appetite
    - ▶ Increased focus
  - ▶ Other common symptoms include:
    - ▶ Increased blood pressure & heart rate
    - ▶ Tics
    - ▶ Dizziness
    - ▶ Stomach pain

# MYTH 1: STUDY DRUGS MAKE ME DO BETTER IN SCHOOL

Middle and high school students

- ▶ Students think this is true because of the symptoms they experience.
  - ▶ Insomnia (staying up all night to study or write a paper)
  - ▶ Intense ability to focus (“Wow, I’m getting so much done!”)
  - ▶ Loss of appetite (uninhibited focus)
- ▶ **However, facts don’t mirror these feelings.** Scientifically, there’s no evidence supporting this.
  - ▶ One 2013 research study found kids who take study drugs non-medically (not to treat ADHD):
    - ▶ Skipped twice as many classes
    - ▶ **Had lower grades**
    - ▶ Partied more than students who don’t take the drugs

# MYTH 2: STUDY DRUGS ARE SAFE

Middle and high school students (and often parents)

- ▶ Stimulants cause many serious side effects, especially when taken in high doses, including:
  - ▶ Violent behavior
  - ▶ Hallucinations
  - ▶ Psychosis
  - ▶ Epilepsy
  - ▶ Sudden death
- ▶ Doctors are aware of these side effects, but temper them by warning patients and adjusting dosage size. The problem is, **non-medical users don't get this warning** from doctors because they don't have a prescription.

- ▶ In addition, stimulants can be deadly for people with certain conditions, like:
  - ▶ High anxiety
  - ▶ Hyperthyroidism
  - ▶ Heart disease
  - ▶ Heart defects
  - ▶ High blood pressure



- ▶ And, stimulants can be addictive.
- ▶ Experts often call them “gateway drugs.”
  - ▶ After using the drugs, the body builds up a tolerance for it. If a student wants the same effect they once had, they have to consume more of it.
  - ▶ Eventually study drugs won't give them the high they're looking for, and they'll turn to illicit drugs.
    - ▶ The next step up for many stimulant users is **cocaine** or **heroin**

# MYTH 3: STUDY DRUGS ARE A COLLEGE THING

Parents of teens

- ▶ This is a common misconception. While most scientific studies do examine college students, there is plenty of data to prove high school and middle school students are using these drugs.
  - ▶ In 2015, 10% of high school sophomores and 12% of seniors said they had used study drugs non-medically at some point.
  - ▶ In the first-ever survey of middle school study drug use, one in every 15 students in 6th – 8th grade said they had used the drugs non-medically.
  - ▶ Shocked?
    - ▶ Only 1% of parents believe their teens have used study drugs, according to a Mott Children’s Hospital study.



# ALL YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED.

Read our comprehensive guide on study drugs, featuring exclusive interviews with industry experts.

[www.teenrehabcenter.org/resources/study-drugs-epidemic/](http://www.teenrehabcenter.org/resources/study-drugs-epidemic/)