

TIPS for TEENS

SEDATIVES

THE TRUTH ABOUT SEDATIVES

**SLANG: BENZOS/PHENNIES/
RED BIRDS/REDS/YELLOW
JACKETS/ YELLOWS/DOWNERS/
SLEEPING PILLS/TRANKS¹**

GET THE FACTS

SEDATIVES CAN BE ADDICTIVE. Although sedatives are often used to treat insomnia, they can be harmful when taken in ways other than as prescribed by a doctor, such as to self-medicate for depression or anxiety. Long-term use may result in needing larger doses to achieve the desired sedation and calming effects, which can lead to addiction.² In some cases it is possible to misjudge how much more is needed, leading to overdose.

SEDATIVES CAN HARM YOUR BODY. It's possible to overdose on sedatives. When someone overdoses on sedatives, their breathing often slows or stops, which decreases the amount of oxygen that reaches the brain. This can cause short- and long-term effects on the nervous system, including coma, permanent brain damage, and even death.³

SEDATIVES CAN BE DEADLY. When mixed with alcohol, sedatives slow heart rate and breathing even more, which can lead to death.⁴ Alcohol and sedatives work synergistically, meaning their efforts are much more potent than when they are used separately.

? Q&A

Q. IF I HAVE BEEN TAKING SEDATIVES EVERY DAY FOR A FEW WEEKS OR LONGER, IS IT SAFE TO STOP TAKING SEDATIVES WHENEVER I WANT?

A. NO. Talk to your doctor. Withdrawal symptoms can be life-threatening and include seizures, increased heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature, as well as visual hallucinations.⁵

Q. AREN'T SEDATIVES LESS DANGEROUS THAN OTHER DRUGS?

A. NO. In fact, sedative overdoses have increased. A recent study showed that the most commonly prescribed sedatives called benzodiazepines were responsible for nearly 30 percent of deaths from medications.⁶

Q. ARE SEDATIVES LESS HARMFUL THAN DRINKING?

A. NO. The effects of sedatives can be harmful and are similar to alcohol intoxication. Symptoms include impaired attention and judgment, inappropriate behavior, decreased reflexes, and lack of balance when walking.⁷

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Even when used as directed, sedatives carry risk. But when misused, sedatives are more dangerous and can even be deadly. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust if you have questions.

LEARN MORE:

Get the latest information on how drugs affect the brain and body at teens.drugabuse.gov.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SEDATIVES, CONTACT:

SAMHSA
1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) (English and Español)

TTY 1-800-487-4889

www.samhsa.gov
store.samhsa.gov



SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



BEFORE YOU RISK IT!

1

KNOW THE LAW. It is illegal to use sedatives without a valid prescription, or to give or sell them to others.⁸

2

KNOW THE RISKS. Even if you have a prescription for sedatives, it is unsafe to use them with other depressants, especially alcohol. Even taking them with some over-the-counter cold and allergy medications could heighten their effects and have deadly consequences.⁹

3

LOOK AROUND YOU. Even if you think your peers are effectively using sedatives to cope with depression or anxiety, the truth is that a very small number of teens are misusing the substances in this way. In 2018, approximately 0.3 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 misused prescription sedatives in the past year.¹⁰



MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR FOR RESOURCES USED IN THIS

"TIPS for TEENS,"
visit store.samhsa.gov or call
1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)
(English and Español).

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KNOW THE SIGNS

How can you tell if a friend is using sedatives? Potential side effects and symptoms include:¹¹

- **Drowsiness**
- **Slurred speech**
- **Poor concentration**
- **Confusion**
- **Dizziness**
- **Problems with movement and memory**
- **Slowed breathing**



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS MISUSING SEDATIVES?

BE A FRIEND. SAVE A LIFE.

Encourage your friend to stop using or seek help from a parent, teacher, or other caring adult.

For 24/7 free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at:

1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

or visit the SAMHSA Treatment Services Locator at findtreatment.gov

¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts#CNSdepressants>

^{2,3} NIDA. (2018). Prescription CNS Depressants. *Drug Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-cns-depressants>

⁴ NIDA. (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts>

⁵ NIDA. (2018). Prescription CNS Depressants. *Drug Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-cns-depressants>

^{6,7} Weaver, M. F. (2015). Prescription sedative misuse and abuse. *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*, 88(3), 247-256.

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice. (2013). Prescription Drugs Fast Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs5/5140/5140p.pdf>

⁹ NIDA. (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts>

¹⁰ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2019). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed tables*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-detailed-tables>

¹¹ NIDA. (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts>