

Summer 2012

## Prescription Drug Abuse Surged 400 Percent in Past Decade

A new White House study found a 400 percent jump in prescription drug abuse between 1998 and 2008. Experts blame a lack of monitoring programs as well as Americans' increasing unwillingness to bear even small pains. **READ MORE** [<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2010/0715/Prescription-drug-abuse-surged-400-percent-in-past-decade>]

## How the Cost of Rx Drug Abuse Adds Up

As the human costs mount, so too do the economic ones. The Coalition Against Insurance Fraud, an alliance of consumer groups, insurance companies and government agencies, put the cost of prescription painkiller abuse for insurers at up to \$72.5 billion in a 2007 study, and other reports show the abuse of such drugs has risen in the years since. **WATCH THE VIDEO** [[http://money.cnn.com/video/news/2012/02/24/n\\_cost\\_of\\_addiction.cnnmoney/](http://money.cnn.com/video/news/2012/02/24/n_cost_of_addiction.cnnmoney/)]

## US Agency Hopes to Curb Prescription Drug Abuse with Education

In July, the US government has begun to make good on a promise to curb the nation's epidemic of prescription-painkiller abuse. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that doctors and patients will have access to training and educational materials on the risks of abuse and addiction associated with opioids, a class of medications prescribed for severe pain. **READ MORE** [<http://blogs.nature.com/news/2012/07/fda-hopes-to-curb-prescription-painkiller-abuse-with-education.html>]

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## Shifting Patterns of Drug Abuse

Humans have used drugs of one sort or another for thousands of years. The practice of burning tobacco and inhaling the resulting smoke may have begun as early as 5000 B.C.; wine was used at least from the time of the early Egyptians; narcotics from 4000 B.C.; and medicinal use of marijuana has been dated to 2737 B.C. in China. It was not until the 19th century when the active substances in drugs were extracted – creating the “modern age” of substance abuse and the “modern day” pharmaceutical industry.

Throughout the years, the public's perception of the dangers of specific substances has changed. The problems of addiction were recognized gradually. The first national drug law passed in the United States was the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. A quick survey of the substance abuse landscape in the U.S. today shows that alcohol and tobacco are still the top two substances of abuse. While highly addictive and actively regulated, both substances are legally purchased and acceptably used in general society. Abuse of both substances has been on the decline over the past 10 years.

The next large segment of drug abuse is illicit (illegal) drugs, including marijuana, cocaine and heroin. Marijuana use is on the rise reflecting softening attitudes about the risk of use. Heroin use has seen some recent increases as a cheap and available substitute for other opiates (mainly prescription opiates such as OxyContin). Cocaine use is down in the U.S... Aside from marijuana, illegal drug use overall is trending downward.

Over the past 40 years, the United States has waged a so-called “war on illegal drugs” with limited success. There is growing momentum to re-examine the effectiveness of this drug abuse-fighting strategy (primarily using interdiction and law enforcement efforts) in light of significant growth in the remaining key segment of drug



abuse — the misuse of legal over-the-counter and prescription medication. **Prescription drug abuse over the past 10 years has skyrocketed — particularly among younger Americans. Studies show that prescription painkillers and stimulants are now the nation's biggest drug problem.** This should come as little surprise since the advent of direct-to-consumer advertising for prescription drugs, which began in 1997. The pharmaceutical industry has seen revenues explode with dramatic increases in the number of prescriptions filled annually. With annual worldwide revenues approaching 1 Trillion dollars, the pharmaceutical industry is nearly as large as the alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug industries combined. Favorable public perception of the risks of prescription drug use and the widespread availability of such drugs will continue to drive this shift in drug abuse patterns.

People abuse drugs for many reasons: peer pressure, relief of stress, increased energy, to relax, to relieve pain, to escape reality, to feel more self-esteem, and for recreation. Not to mention the belief that use has positive health affects or enhances one's appearance. None of these basic human purposes for use and abuse are likely to diminish soon. However, the substances abused, and their combinations and derivations are clearly shifting toward “legal” drug abuse — with the same adverse consequences as other substances of abuse.

*Sources: The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed and The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)*

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## Opana and Evolving Prescription Drug Abuse

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has classified the misuse of powerful prescription painkillers as an “epidemic” as of 2008 when overdose deaths of opioid pain relievers surpassed deaths from heroin and cocaine combined. One of the newer drugs of abuse is the prescription painkiller Opana.

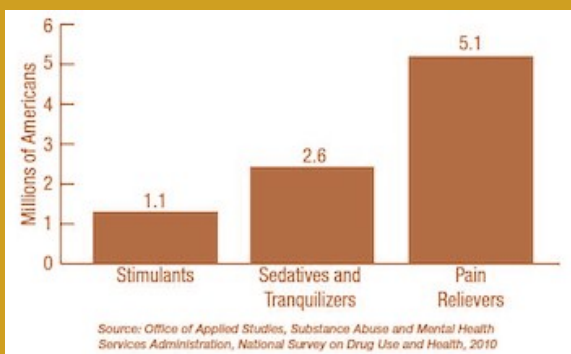
OxyContin (nicknamed “hillbilly heroin”) was well established as drug abusers’ number one painkiller of choice until Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of OxyContin, reformulated it in August 2010 to make it virtually impossible to crush, dissolve or inject. Addicts flooded chat rooms to find new ways to abuse OxyContin but to no avail. When OxyContin became difficult to abuse, users shifted their focus to an even stronger substitute; Endo Pharmaceuticals’ Opana.

To put Opana’s impact on prescription drug abuse into perspective; in 2010, 2 percent of the state of Kentucky’s overdose victims had Opana in their blood. In 2011, that percentage rose to 23 percent. Opana is now considered today’s biggest prescription drug threat because of its appeal to abusers. Police departments in urban to rural America have seen an alarming spike in the abuse of this drug and fear that the peak has not even been reached. A grim outlook is that these same abusers will gravitate to illicit street drugs as the supply dwindles and prices soar (a 40mg tablet of Opana has a street value of around \$65.)

## Did You Know...

- U.S. Citizens consume approximately 71% of the world’s oxycodone (drugs such as OxyContin) and 99% of the world’s hydrocodone (drugs such as Vicodin)
- 1 in 5 American children over the age of 12 have admitted to abusing prescription drugs
- In the U.S. alone, more than 15 million people abuse prescription drugs — more than the combined number who reported abusing cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants and heroin

## Facts About Prescription Drug Abuse



About 7 million Americans reported past-month use of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes in 2010.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), three types of drugs are abused most often:

- **Opioids**—prescribed for pain relief
- **CNS depressants**—barbiturates and benzodiazepines prescribed for anxiety or sleep problems (often referred to as sedatives or tranquilizers)
- **Stimulants**—prescribed for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the sleep disorder narcolepsy or obesity.

## Events Calendar

*Save the date*

**The Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association and Florida Council for Community Mental Health Annual Conference**

August 8-10, 2012

Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress, Orlando, FL

CONTACT: [www.fadaa-fcmhannualconference.org](http://www.fadaa-fcmhannualconference.org)

**2012 Risk Management & Finance Summit for Nonprofits**

August 26-28, 2012

Hard Rock Hotel, Chicago, IL

CONTACT: [www.nonprofitrisk.org](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org)

**National Conference on Addiction Disorders**

September 28-October 2, 2012

Gaylord Palms, Orlando, FL

CONTACT: [www.addictionpro.com](http://www.addictionpro.com)

**2012 Annual National Eating Disorders Association Conference**

October 11-13, 2012

Renaissance Vinoy Resort & Golf Club, St. Petersburg, FL

CONTACT:

[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)