

Pharmaceutical misuse

Are you taking
a risk?



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Pharmaceutical drugs such as medicine prescribed by a doctor provide many benefits including increasing our quality of life. Most people use these drugs appropriately, however, the misuse of pharmaceuticals - in particular opioids, including over-the-counter codeine, and benzodiazepines - is increasing.

This flyer provides information on pharmaceutical misuse in Australia, and how it can impact our health and wellbeing.

What is pharmaceutical misuse?

- Taking more medication than prescribed
- Taking medication differently to what's recommended
- Using medication without a prescription
- Combining it with other drugs, including alcohol
- Continuing with activities that medication affects, like driving, working or looking after children
- Sharing prescription medications

Who is at risk?

If you suffer from stress, anxiety, pain or insomnia and use pharmaceutical medication to treat your symptoms, you could be at risk of harm.



Why do we take prescription medication?

Stress

Many of us have suffered from stress at some stage, related to things like work, trauma, or loss of a loved one. However, the most common stressors for Australians are:

- Personal finance issues
- Family issues
- Personal health issues

Anxiety

Anxiety is the most common mental health issue, and severe anxiety can be extremely debilitating and have a serious impact on daily life. It can also manifest physically in the form of:

- Restlessness or being 'on edge'
- Fatigue
- Low concentration
- Poor sleep
- Muscle tension
- Irritability



Insomnia

The most common indicators of insomnia are difficulty in falling asleep or maintaining sleep. There are many reasons why sleep patterns are disrupted, including:

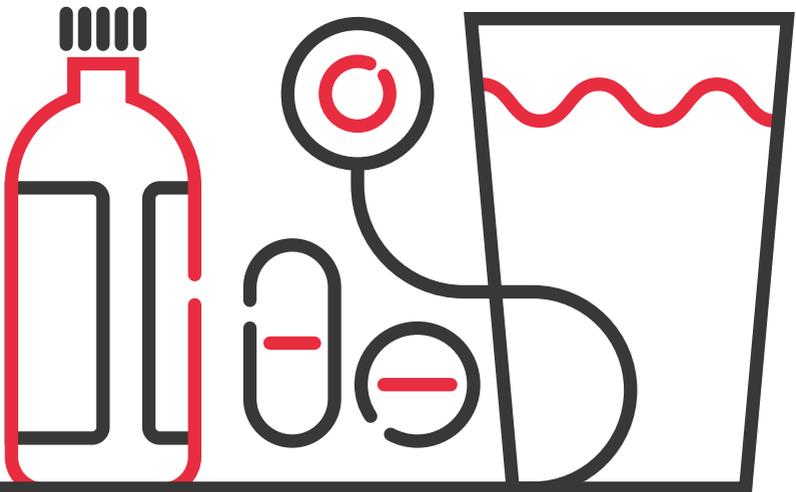
- Stress, anxiety, depression
- Pain
- Alcohol consumption
- Shift work

Pain

There are two types of pain we're likely to use prescription medications for:

- Chronic pain, classified as pain that continues for more than three months
- Acute pain which occurs after surgery, trauma or other medical conditions and lasts a shorter time

In some instances, **acute pain** can become **chronic pain**.



Which medications can cause dependence?

Strong painkillers

Typically prescribed for both acute and chronic pain, these medications can be effective in the short-term, but have been proven to lose effectiveness quickly and can cause dependence. They can also be dangerous in high doses or when combined with alcohol or other drugs:

- Codeine
- Fentanyl
- Oxycodone

Minor tranquilizers

For short periods of time benzodiazepines can be helpful— when used with other forms of therapy, but they can also be addictive. These medications can also be dangerous when used in increased doses or when combined with alcohol or other drugs.

What are the risks?

Research concludes that strong painkillers and medication often used to treat stress, anxiety and insomnia generally shouldn't be used for very long. This is because they can:

- Cause dependence
- Reduce sex drive and fertility
- Affect your mood
- Become less effective over time

How can I reduce the risks?

- Talk to your health professional
- Take medicines according to the instructions
- Be aware of potential interactions
- Store medicines properly and safely
- Make sure the medicine is not damaged or too old
- Regularly review your medicines with your health professional
- Do not share medicines
- Be aware of the effects on driving ability



For help and support or
to find out more, visit:

adf.org.au

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