



## ADDICTION

# PAINKILLERS, STIMULANTS AND DEPRESSANTS: THE NEW DRUG OF CHOICE

According to The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), painkillers are not the only prescription drugs that are being abused. There are typically three classes of medications that are frequently misused for reasons other than their intended prescription.

### Opioids

Painkillers, particularly those containing opioids, are often referred to as 'heroin lite' by medical professionals. This is because they target the same regions of the brain as heroin does, and taking them increases the susceptibility of becoming dependent on narcotics. The NIDA confirms that half the heroin users they surveyed, said their addiction started with prescription medication.

### Stimulants

These drugs are usually prescribed for attention deficit disorders and narcolepsy. They have a direct effect on the brain, increasing its alertness and activity, they reduce fatigue, and have a similar effect to the street drug cocaine. Overuse can lead to anxiety, shaking, heart palpitations, sweating, restlessness and even hallucinations.

Another form of stimulant, which many people 'abuse' is caffeine; it can have the same effect as drugs when intake is high.

### Depressants

Depressants have the opposite effect. They are prescribed to treat anxiety, stress, panic attacks and sleep disorders. They work by decreasing brain activity and have a calming effect. It's this that makes them a tempting choice to abuse, particularly in individuals that are prone to heightened periods of stress and anxiety.

Overuse induces a tolerance effect in the body, which requires the user to take increased doses to obtain the desired effect. When the drugs are stopped, withdrawal can leave the mind racing and, in some cases, lead to seizures and other serious health risks. It's for this reason that attempts to curb addiction should be done under the care of a doctor, and not attempted alone.

Whatever it is you need support for, there is always someone you can ask for help. Whether it's a close friend, family member, community member or counsellor, take the necessary steps today to ease the burden of the situation.