Prescription drug abuse is the use of prescription medication in a manner that is not prescribed by a health care practitioner. This includes using someone else’s prescription or using your own prescription in a way not directed by your doctor.

Most people take prescription medication responsibly under a doctor’s care. However, there has been a steady increase in the non-medical use of these medications, especially by teenagers. Part of the problem is the availability of medications (over-the-counter and prescription) in the family medicine cabinet which can provide easy access to children, adults, elderly and visitors. People often mistakenly believe that these medications are safe because they are approved by the FDA and prescribed by a physician. Nonmedical use of certain prescription drugs can lead to addiction.

Why you should be concerned

FACT: Among persons aged 12 or older who used pain relievers non-medically in the past year, an estimated 70% obtained them from a friend or relative. (NSDUH 2011)

FACT: Nonmedical use of prescription drugs among youth and young adults aged 12 to 25 in 2011 was the second most prevalent illicit drug use category, with marijuana being first. (NSDUH 2011)

FACT: According to the Federal Drug Abuse Warning Network, emergency room visits due to abuse of prescription drugs are greater than the number of visits due to abuse of marijuana and heroin combined.

FACT: Studies report that older persons regularly consume on average between two and six prescription medications and between one and three over-the-counter medications. An estimated one in five older Americans (19 percent) may be affected by combined difficulties with alcohol and medication misuse.

FACT: Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medicine Abuse

A Medicine Cabinet Inventory

Why you should be concerned

The following organizations offer information and resources that can help you and your family.

New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services
The Partnership at Drugfree.org
Al-Anon and Alateen
SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services National Institute on Drug Abuse National Council on Alcohol & Drug Dependence


1-877-8-HOPENY 1-877-8-HOPENY
(Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Problem Gambling)

www.ozas.ny.gov 518-473-3460
www.drugfree.org 855-378-4373
www.al-anon.alateen.org 757-563-1600
www.samhsa.gov 240-276-1660
www.samhsa.gov 877-SAMHSA-7
www.drugabuse.gov 800-662-HELP
www.ncadd.org 800-NCACALL

Produced by the New York State Department of Health and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services
**Medicine Cabinet Inventory**

Use the following chart to help keep track of the medications in your medicine cabinet. List the name and strength of the prescription and nonprescription medications. Include the date filled, the expiration date, and the original quantity. Once a week, count the pills remaining and mark the date. To properly dispose of unused or expired medications, mix them with used cat litter, coffee grounds or sawdust to make them less appealing before throwing them in the garbage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medication Name and Strength</th>
<th>Date Filled</th>
<th>Expiration Date</th>
<th>Original Quantity</th>
<th>Quantity Remaining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How you can use the Medicine Cabinet Inventory**

- List all prescriptions, including over-the-counter medications.
- Include the date of purchase and quantity.
- Include recommended dosage. Never increase or decrease doses without talking to your doctor.
- Keep all medications out of reach of all young children and adolescents.
- To properly dispose of unused or expired medications, mix them with used cat litter, coffee grounds, or sawdust to make them less appealing before throwing them in the garbage.

**Communicate with Your Family**

- Remind seniors in your home that many medications do not mix well with alcohol or other medications, including herbal remedies.
- Teach your teens and younger children to respect medicines. Medicines are important tools in health care but they must be used according to directions.
- Set clear expectations with your teenagers and let them know that under no circumstances should they ever take medications without your knowledge.

**What you can do**

**Educate Yourself**

- Be aware of the medications in your home. Have open conversations about appropriate versus inappropriate use of medication. Inform your friends and family that abusing medications can be just as dangerous as using illegal drugs.
- Ask your health care provider if any medications prescribed for your family have a potential for abuse.
- Be familiar with the warning signs of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse. Warning signs can be both behavioral and physical, and may include withdrawal from normal activities, irritability, unusual requests for money, unexplained changes in friends and frequent nasal or sinus infections.

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