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. 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.

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

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
KNOW THE LAW. It is illegal to use sedatives without a valid prescription, or to give or sell them to others.¹

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.²

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.³

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:⁴

- 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


