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Health e-Tools

10 Warning Signs of Prescription Painkiller Dependency

Thousands of Americans rely on prescription painkillers for the relief of [pain](#) and discomfort from ailments such as [headaches](#), [menstrual cramps](#), [surgery](#) recovery or lingering pain from an injury. Unfortunately however, for many, this reliance on medication can easily and unknowingly turn into physical dependence.

The scary fact is that the most commonly prescribed drugs including [OxyContin](#), [Vicodin](#), [Methadone](#), [Darvocet](#), Lortab, Lorcet and [Percocet](#), while offering relief from pain, can also cause individuals' bodies to start "needing" the drugs in order to feel normal, and the result is the new, even more challenging situation of chemical dependency. Here are ten warning signs to watch for if you think someone you know may be experiencing a dependency on these drugs.

- 1. Usage Increase** - Over time, it is common for individuals taking prescription medications to grow tolerant to the effects of their prescribed dose. If someone you know seems to be increasing his/her dose over time, this is an indication that the amount they were taking is no longer providing them relief.
- 2. Change in Personality** - Changes in a person's normal behavior can be a sign of dependency. Shifts in energy, mood, and concentration may occur as every day responsibilities become secondary to the need for the relief the prescription provides.
- 3. Social Withdrawal** - A person experiencing a dependency problem may withdraw from family, friends and other social interaction.
- 4. Ongoing Use** - Continued usage after a medical condition has improved will result in the person needing extensions on his/her prescription. The person might talk of how they are "still feeling pain" and need just a little longer on the medication in order to get well. He or she might also complain frequently about the doctors who refused to write the prescription for one reason or another.
- 5. Time Spent on Obtaining Prescriptions** - A dependant person will spend large amounts of time driving great distances and visiting multiple doctors to obtain the drugs. Watch for signs that he or she seems preoccupied with a quest for medication, demonstrating that the drug has become their top priority.
- 6. Change in Daily Habits and Appearance** - Personal [hygiene](#) may diminish as a result of a drug [addiction](#). Sleeping and eating habits change, and a person may have a constant [cough](#), [runny nose](#) and red, glazed eyes.
- 7. Neglects Responsibilities** - A dependent person may call in sick to work more often, and neglect household chores and bills.
- 8. Increased Sensitivity** - Normal sights, sounds and emotions might become overly stimulating to the person. Hallucinations, although perhaps difficult to monitor, may occur as well.
- 9. Blackouts and Forgetfulness** - Another clear indication of dependence is when the person regularly forgets events that have taken place and appears to be suffering blackouts.
- 10. Defensiveness** - When attempting to hide a drug dependency, abusers can become very defensive if they feel their secret is being discovered. They might even react to simple requests or questions by lashing out.

Prescriptions to pain medication can be safe when taken according to the doctor's instructions and are carefully monitored. However, it is important to recognize that they can also be very dangerous. Remember that dependency is a disease that can exhibit itself to even the most cautious individual. Therefore, anyone who is prescribed pain medications should take extra precautions to avoid the debilitating effects a dependency can have and watch for the warning signs.

This information has been provided with the kind permission of Clifford Bernstein M.D., of [The Waismann Institute](#).

For additional information, please see the following MedicineNet.com areas:

- [Chronic Pain](#)
- [Understanding Drug Abuse and Addiction](#)

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