

## OTC and Prescription Drugs

In a discussion of drugs, "good" or "bad" are not appropriate designations. Drugs may be helpful or harmful, depending on how they are used.

**Prescription Drugs** are ordered by a doctor in writing. **Over-the-counter (OTC)** drugs are medicines that can be bought without a prescription. Prescription Drugs are stronger than OTC drugs, have more serious side effects, may interfere with other drugs, and can be addictive. These drugs are regulated by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA).

**Drug use** refers to taking a drug correctly for a legitimate medical reason. Examples include:

- Taking aspirin for headaches
- Using insulin for diabetes
- Being given morphine for pain relief

**Drug misuse** refers to taking a legal drug inappropriately. Examples include:

- Using drugs with an expired shelf life
- Swapping pills (someone giving a friend or relative some pain pills left over from his or her recent surgery)
- Accidentally taking the wrong drug (taking a blood pressure medication instead of a heart medication)
- Taking a drug incorrectly (if two Tylenol are good, maybe five will be better for my headache)

**Drug abuse** is the compulsive, excessive, and self-damaging use of habit forming drugs or substances leading to addiction or dependence, serious physiological injury, and/or psychological harm, hallucinations or death. Examples include:

- Taking a drug for a purpose unrelated to a medical need
- Taking a drug to create a state of euphoria
- Taking a potent pain reliever like heroin simply to get high
- Using any drug to create altered consciousness
- Underage drinking

**Drug Interactions** happen when drugs react with another drug, food or dietary supplement. Interactions may either increase or decrease the effect of a drug.

**Mixing alcohol and medicines can be harmful.**

- It can make you sleepy, drowsy, or lightheaded and you may have trouble concentrating or performing mechanical skills. With certain drugs it can cause nausea and vomiting, headaches, drowsiness, fainting, or loss of coordination. It also can put you at risk for internal bleeding, heart problems, and difficulties in breathing.
- The combination can lead to falls and serious injuries, especially among older people.
- It is dangerous to drive when you mix alcohol with certain medicines.
- In addition to these dangers, alcohol can make a medication less effective or even useless, or it may make the medication harmful or toxic to your body.

