



THE KILLER IN YOUR **CUPBOARD**



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INTRODUCTION

When we hear the word “drugs”, we probably think of things like marijuana, cocaine and heroin. The word “addict” brings up visions of dirty, homeless and hopeless beggars; old men stumbling along the pavement; jittery and sweating young men and maybe even rock stars.

We are blissfully unaware of abuse-able and addictive products that we have in our cupboards. We are referring to seemingly innocent goods like prescription pain killers, over the counter **cough mixtures** and even coffee. Seeing these products as drugs, causes us to broaden our perspective of addicts to include our co-workers, neighbours and even our grandmother.

Drug abuse and addiction go far beyond street drugs. We have to widen the spectrum and have the knowledge that, because it can be bought off the shelf at our corner grocery store or over the counter at our local pharmacy, it is not necessarily safe and non-addictive. When a household product is not used for its intended purpose, or an over the counter drug is not used as directed or prescription medication is not taken as prescribed, we run the risk that it is being abused. This can be a significant risk to your health and serious problems like full blown **addiction** can arise.



We are probably most aware of the abuse of over the counter drugs (OTC). OTCs are sold to people without prescriptions and help for various ailments like flu, colds, coughs, insomnia, headache, lack of energy and stomach pain.

Because of its wide and convenient availability, as well as being relatively cheap, its abuse and subsequent addiction are common. People of all ages, increasingly children and teenagers, are abusing cough medicine, diet pill and sleeping aids in large quantities. Many types of prescription drugs

are regularly abused, but **painkillers** mostly so and they are also the most dangerous. Nearly 75% of all prescription drug overdoses are the result of prescription painkillers.

They are prescribed to reduce the discomfort of suffering from pain of any sort. Unfortunately many health professionals do not treat them with the deserved necessary respect and not everyone understands the dangers that they present. People in all walks of life fall victim to this form of dependency, which makes its abuse a growing problem in most developed countries.

WHAT IS IN YOUR CUPBOARD THAT CAN LEAD TO ADDICTION?

It is interesting how some of the most used and innocent products in our house have the potential to be abused and cause chaos and heartache in lives. It is important that families are aware of behavioural changes in our loved ones and not be afraid to discuss abuse and addiction openly.



Painkillers

Most of us have some form of painkillers in our cupboard, either prescription or bought over the counter.

An active ingredient in many prescription drugs, OTC painkillers, cough mixtures, and cold and flu medication, like Mybulen, Myprodol, Benylin C, AdcoDol, Syndol, Sinutab C and Sinumax Co, is **codeine**. In many countries, products containing codeine are only obtainable on prescription. In South Africa, where many of our rehab centres are, codeine is easily obtainable through unmonitored purchases.

Opioid painkillers, like **OxyContin**, are only available on prescription. Opioid is a chemical, and its effects resemble those of morphine and heroin. It is a highly effective analgesic, but unfortunately, due to this mimic effect, it is also highly addictive. Some of the most abused opioids are Vicodin, Percocet and Methadone.

A lot of people who get addicted to opioids and codeine are what is being referred to as “the unlikely addicts”, and are average people; from stay-at-home moms to respected community members and business professionals. The medication may, for instance, be prescribed by a doctor after surgery and taken as prescribed, but the longer it is used, the more of it must be taken to have the same effect. They are not necessarily seeking the high or trying to abuse the medication. They use the medication normally and incorporate its use into their daily life. Before they realise it, they have developed a psychological and physical dependency on the medication, which leads users to use illegal means to get it, like frequenting pill mills (pain clinics) and doctor shopping (going from one doctor to another). Once addicted we find that they may grind up the tablets and snort them for a faster high or combine them with other medication to intensify the high.

A lot of people are under the false impression that prescription painkillers are safe for recreational use and to use it while partying. They snort or inject it and combine it with alcohol to intensify the high. This increases the risk of overdose and death.

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Sedatives and sleeping tablets

The generic term used for medication that treats anxiety and sleeping problems is benzos, which is derived from **benzodiazepine**, which is Diazepam. It is the active ingredient in probably the most well-known anti-anxiety tablet, Valium, as well as other popular brand names like Xanax and Ativan. Benzos are psychoactive depressants and are being abused because of its sedating, sleep-inducing and muscle relaxing properties. In the past, barbiturates used to be prescribed mostly for sleeping problems, but this is not common anymore, as the risk of overdose is too high.

Some people use sleeping tablets to enhance the effect of alcohol and other drugs. They grow to like the way the tablets sedate them and calm their minds and sometimes the feeling can be equal to that of being drunk on alcohol

Stimulants

Stimulants are commonly known as “uppers” and generally refer to drugs that increase alertness and energy, as well as heart rate, respiration and blood pressure. Amphetamines, like Dexedrine and **Adderall**, as well as caffeine, are stimulants that can most probably be found in your cupboard. These days, amphetamines are most commonly prescribed for the treatment of narcolepsy, ADHD and depression. Diet tablets are also stimulants and are mostly abused by teens, although people of all ages use them. Most of us have aerosol cans of certain cleaning products in our homes. When inhaled inappropriately, they can be associated with very short, but intense highs and abuse can lead to addiction.

Motion sickness drugs

Motion sickness drugs are used recreationally for its psychedelic properties, it can change your perception of reality and alter your sensory experiences. In high doses, motion sickness medication, like Dramamine and Benadryl, can cause the user to feel high and have hallucinations, not unlike some street drugs. They are probably in your cupboard for use when travelling by car or boat, or for use by pregnant women for morning sickness. Regular use can create tolerance, meaning you need higher doses to get the same hallucinogenic buzz. This can lead to dependency and addiction.



Laxatives

Laxatives are most often used as intended, but it is regularly abused by people with eating disorders to lose weight. They take these tables too often, in order to get rid of excess undigested food, fat and even water.



THE DANGERS OF THESE POTENTIALLY ADDICTIVE PRODUCTS

The most significant danger of these “killers in your cupboard” is that fact that they are so freely available to be used and abused. They are also highly addictive and the process of stopping is difficult and sometimes dangerous.

Prescription painkillers

Opioids change the way that the nervous system responds to pain. It blocks the transmission and reception of pain signals in the brain, which causes a feeling of euphoria. It is this feeling that causes the psychological dependency.

With increased use, the addicts’ physical and mental health deteriorate, which leaves a real concern of possible permanent damage to internal systems and organs. Extended abuse can lead to chronic liver damage, including acute liver toxicity, while muscle and nerve damage are not uncommon. In some cases, a full physical and mental recovery is not possible. Opioids also slow down a person’s respiration rate, which can, as the addicts increase their doses, ultimately cause their breathing to slow down so much that it stops, causing death.

Withdrawal from painkillers may be accompanied by fevers and flu-like symptoms, sweating and chills, nausea, vomiting, shakes, bone and muscle pain, insomnia and intense feelings of depression.

In 2010, overdose from prescription painkillers caused more deaths in America than heroin and cocaine combined. For every one death, 10 people enter treatment for abuse.

People who abuse painkillers invariably start increasing their requests for the filling of their prescriptions and often use the excuse that they have lost the previous one. They start losing weight and cannot explain why. They also keep on complaining about escalating pain, despite increased medication.

They have severe mood swings and become increasingly irritable, while also experiencing a change in their sleeping patterns – they either start suffering from insomnia or sleep much more. They give inconsistent answers to questions about their prescription drug use, including amount, date of last prescription, quantity received and location filled. They start breaking or crushing their pills and start borrowing medication from family and friends, order online or do doctor shopping.

Sleeping tablets

People who start relying on sleeping tablets over a long period of time, are most at risk of becoming addicted, which means that they have become **both physically and psychologically dependent on them.**

One of the biggest dangers of addiction to sleeping pills is the increased tolerance, which means that more need to be taken to have the same effect - this increases the risk of overdose. Abuse can cause damage to body organs and some types of sleeping tablets can cause blurred vision and respiratory problems.

A significant side effect is that it leads to depression, increasing the risk of suicide. It also causes a deterioration in a person's sense of coordination, which increases the risk of accidents.

Addiction will cause an obsession with ensuring a regular supply, which leads to law-breaking and unethical acts. Withdrawal is also a danger once the dose is reduced or the taking stops. Signs of **sleeping pill** addiction are that the addict finds it hard to cope without sleeping pills and loses interest in life in general; including hobbies, personal hygiene and grooming. They become less likely to fulfil personal and social responsibilities, while when being confronted about this, they become very defensive and deny that they have a problem, but once challenged, they cannot reduce the sleeping pill dosage.

The most common withdrawal symptoms from sleeping tablets include: insomnia, hallucinations, anxiety, seizures, confusion as well as changes in blood pressure, pulse and respiratory rate.



Stimulants

Stimulants come in many forms and a lot of them are addictive. The ones you are most likely to find in your cupboard are **caffeine** (the world's most popular drug), inhalants, diet tablets and probably enough products to "cook up" methamphetamine. Stimulants mostly increase heart and breathing rate and blood pressure, while it dilates pupils. The user may experience anxiety, sleeplessness, dizziness, blurred vision, headache, dry mouth and sweating, while abuse could cause irregular heartbeat, loss of coordination, tremors and even physical collapse. The long-term use of stimulants can have significant negative health effects, like malnutrition, ulcers and skin disorders, speech and thought disturbances and depression. When amphetamines are injected it can cause lung or heart disease, kidney damage and a sudden increase in blood pressure that can lead to a stroke, as well as very high fever or heart failure. Long-term use can lead to hallucinations, delusions and paranoia.

Physical withdrawal will occur when using is discontinued. The symptoms of withdrawal are fatigue, sleep disturbances and depression, as well as feelings of anxiety, moodiness and restlessness.

Deaths have also been reported from caffeine overdose, but mostly due to taking tablets. High doses of caffeine can cause diarrhoea, nausea, trembling, nervousness and headaches. Withdrawal include headaches, irritability and mood changes.

Motion sickness pills

When motion sickness pills are being abused, one can normally notice it due to discarded medicine packages, long periods of isolation, poor grades, loss of interest in social activities and abandonment of good friends, unexplained loss of energy, lack of appetite, unusual clumsiness, weakness, vomiting, difficulty with urination and slurred speech.

The dangers of large doses include hallucinations, excessive drowsiness, ringing in the ears, dry mouth, hyperactivity, headaches, loss of motor coordination, nausea, confusion, seizures, coma and death.

Laxatives

Laxative addiction is mostly a side product of an eating disorder, like bulimia, but abuse and the inability to stop is not abnormal. Laxative abuse can have serious health risks. They include bloody bowel movements, rectal bleeding, severe stomach cramps, dizziness, weakness and unusual fatigue.



The frequent loose bowel movements resulting from excessive laxative use, can lead to deadly electrolyte imbalance, which can cause tiredness and muscle weakness, seizures and abnormal heart rhythm; which can again lead to cardiac arrest and death. It can also cause malnourishment, due to the intestines losing their ability to absorb nutrients. Laxative abuse can also result in dysfunctional bowel syndrome, which causes constipation, faecal impaction and the inability to have a bowel movement without more laxatives.



THE MOVE TO THE DARK SIDE

Addiction to and abuse of prescription drugs is nothing new. Many authorities are doing their best to crack down on this trend. There are some dangerous withdrawal symptoms associated with coming off prescription drugs, and finding a way to avoid these withdrawals is a primary concern for many addicted men and women. The move to clamp down on the issuing of prescription medication has had an unintended result, in that **heroin** is gradually replacing the prescription medication as a drug-of-choice. Heroin is an opioid, which makes it a substitute for the prescription pills.

OVERCOMING ADDICTION

Overcoming addiction is not easy and it should be treated carefully. It is advised that a professional is always consulted when someone is thinking of quitting using drugs. Kicking painkiller addiction is especially complex and difficult and should be handled cautiously. The only true option where addiction is involved, is complete abstinence. Seeking treatment is the most effective way to get healthy, and to prevent an overdose or an unhealthy shock to the system due to withdrawal. Addiction can be overcome and with the correct treatment, addicts can get healthy and live productive, sober lives.

Where the addiction is heavy and long-term, it is strongly recommended that some type of residential rehab program be used. Opioid addiction have painful and uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms, so a medically supervised detoxification program is recommended to get through those symptoms. In rehab, the person will receive all the necessary support and be taught the skills of how to live and enjoy life without the use of drugs.

It is an incorrect assumption that treatment has to be voluntary to be successful. People who are not motivated to be admitted to treatment can develop that motivation in treatment and experience success with their recovery. The most effective way to convince someone to go for treatment, is to stage an intervention.

For more information see:

www.wedorecover.com/alcohol-treatment-documents/We-Do-Recover--Interventions-Guide.pdf