



Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
Clint Eastwood Youth Program



It's not just the prescription counter you have to look out for

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications are one of the fastest growing classifications of drugs currently abused by teens. Often these medications are readily available, inexpensive, and perceived to be perfectly safe.

Most teens who abuse OTC medications are unaware of the potential dangers. These drugs are legal and may have been given to them when they were ill by their parents. People generally regard OTCs as safer than illegal or prescription drugs, assuming that something obtained so easily must be relatively harmless.

As many as one-third of teens think it's okay to use OTC medications to get high at least once in awhile, and more than half don't feel that it's particularly risky. But the facts indicate otherwise.

Some commonly used/abused OTC drugs

Cough medicine: Many cough medicines contain an ingredient called dextromethorphan (DXM). While safe and effective for coughs when used as directed, it can produce a "high" when used in large amounts. Effects of DXM include confusion, dizziness, distorted vision, slurred speech, trouble with coordination, drowsiness, rapid heartbeat, nausea and vomiting, hallucinations, and loss of motor control.

Diet pills: Even the most natural diet pill can be dangerous. While the FDA banned several ingredients previously used in diet pills due to safety issues, this does not mean that the remaining ingredients are necessarily safe. Diet pills can cause nervousness and tremor, digestive problems, kidney problems, dehydration, increased heart rate, high blood pressure, and even heart failure.

Pain relievers: Pain relievers like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen are safe and effective when used as directed. But teens may abuse these medications because they believe them to be safe, even when taken in greater amounts than specified on the label. They mistakenly believe that if two Tylenol don't help they should take two more. Acetaminophen toxicity is one of the most common causes of acute liver failure, a condition that is more likely when acetaminophen is combined with alcohol. And ibuprofen in excess can cause stomach bleeding and even kidney failure.

Motion sickness pills: Motion sickness pills such as Dramamine® can cause hallucinations when taken in large doses.

Sexual performance pills: OTC sexual performance pills are sometimes used to counteract the effects of alcohol on sexual performance. These medications can cause heart problems, especially in combination with alcohol.

What about herbal products?

There is also a growing trend of herbal drug use for psychedelic, stimulant, and euphoric effects. Many believe that herbal products must be safe because they are "natural." But many of these products can be dangerous and even deadly, particularly if used in combination with other drugs or alcohol. Some of the more popular herbs and their effects are listed below.

Herbal ecstasy: Names include “Cloud 9,” “Ultimate Xphoria,” and “Rave Energy.” Herbal ecstasy is created by combining various herbs sold in pill form; the pills may be swallowed whole or ground up together and then snorted or smoked. The effects include euphoria, increased awareness, and enhanced sexual sensations. The active ingredient in herbal ecstasy is ephedra (or ma huang). This herb was used for weight control but was banned due to cardiovascular and neurological side effects (heart attacks, stroke, increased blood pressure, seizures, and death). Unfortunately, this ban pertained only to dietary supplements and not to other herbal remedies such as teas and traditional Chinese preparations that contain ma huang or ephedra. Herbal ecstasy is often purchased in gas stations, music stores, health food stores, nightclubs, and online.

Salvia divinorum: Sometimes referred to as “Magic Mint,” “Shepherdess’s Herb,” or “Sally-D,” this herb is grown in the United States and sold as dried leaves, extract, seeds, or whole plants in tobacco shops, in herbal remedy stores, and online. Salvia is related to the mint family. Users smoke or ingest the plant to produce an intense hallucinogenic experience. The active ingredient in salvia, salvinorin-A, acts like a spinal pain reliever; it may cause loss of control over the body, severe anxiety, accidents, and injuries.

Morning glory seeds: Also known as tlitlitzin, seeds are pulverized to improve absorption and then ingested to produce visual imagery and hallucinations. The active ingredient in morning glory seeds is lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide (LSA), a less potent form of a chemical related to LSD. Side effects may include nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain.

Amanita mushrooms: Sometimes called “Japanese Panther” and “Fly Agaric,” the active ingredients in amanita mushrooms are ibotenic acid, muscimol, and muscazone. These mushrooms are eaten or sometimes smoked to cause euphoria and sensory alterations, especially of hearing. Side effects can include nausea, problems with balance and coordination, and drowsiness. With high doses, mushrooms can result in coma or even death.

Nutmeg: May be ingested in large amounts in powdered form, as a paste, or combined with other ingredients (to increase palatability) in an effort to induce euphoria and hallucinations. The active ingredients in nutmeg are alkylbenzene derivatives and terpenes, which affect the central nervous system. Side effects such as blurred vision, nausea and vomiting, dizziness, palpitations, lowered blood pressure, and rapid heart rate may occur. This kernel of the fruit of an evergreen tree is popular as a spice for baked goods.

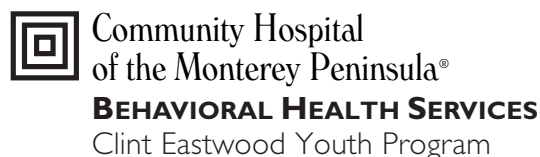
Peyote: The active ingredient in peyote is mescaline. The top of the peyote cactus is dried and ground into a powder, which is swallowed or smoked to cause hallucinations. Side effects may include nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, dizziness, sweating, restlessness, and palpitations.

Betel nut: After caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine, betel nut is the fourth most abused substance in the world. It comes from the areca palm tree. Betel nut is chewed or mixed with other spices, leaves, or tobacco to produce a stimulant effect. It can be purchased in ethnic grocery stores or online. The active ingredient in betel nut is arecoline, which may cause rapid or irregular heartbeat, lowered blood pressure, vomiting, dizziness, and seizures. Chronic use of betel nut can cause addiction, as well as red staining of the teeth and gums and the potential for oral cancers.

There is so much to look out for, and parents are the best deterrent. Talk to your teens, be a presence in their lives (even if it bugs them), know where they are and who they are with. Listen, listen, listen. If you need help, we’re here.

This information is brought to you by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula’s Clint Eastwood Youth Program, providing a structured program to treat drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems.

For more information or to schedule a free screening, please call 373-0924 or 800-528-8080



Hartnell Professional Center, 576 Hartnell Street, Monterey, CA 93940 • clinteastwoodyouthprogram@chomp.org
A private, not-for-profit organization