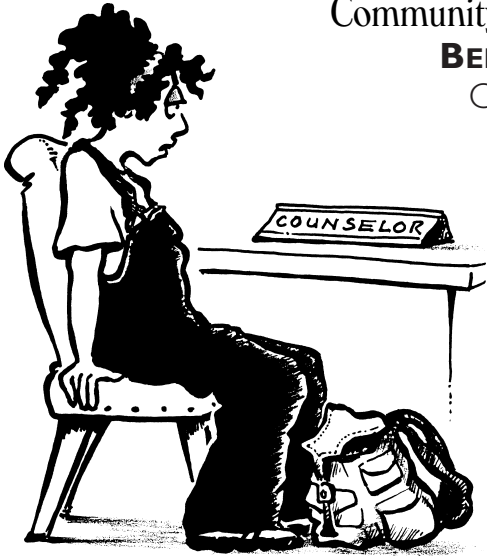




Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
Clint Eastwood Youth Program



Ritalin use and abuse

In 1990 doctors prescribed Ritalin for 900,000 American kids. Today it is estimated that 4 to 5 million children per year are taking Ritalin by prescription.

Ritalin has a calming effect on hyperactive children and a 'focusing' effect on those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). When taken as prescribed, Ritalin is a valuable treatment for ADHD. Research has shown that people with ADHD who take their medication as prescribed under a physician's care, do not get addicted to that medication. Ritalin (methylphenidate) is a central nervous system stimulant, similar to amphetamines in nature and duration. When taken in accordance with usual prescription instructions, it has mild to moderate stimulant properties.

Most people who take prescription medications take them responsibly. However in 1999, about 2 percent of the population over age 12 were using prescription drugs for non-medical reasons. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse indicates the sharpest increases in new users of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes occur in 12- to 25-year-olds. Ritalin intoxication, which occurs as a result of taking it for a non-medical reason, has now reached the same level of emergency room visits for children ages 10 to 14 as cocaine intoxication.

The Party Drug?

Drugs prescribed for ADHD and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) have grown in popularity as party drugs. Many teens and even grade-schoolers get the drugs from peers being treated for ADD or ADHD. These users crush the pills and snort them to get a cocaine-like rush. The pills can also be dissolved in water and "cooked" for intravenous injection for a strong stimulant effect. Some adolescents, (often as part of the rave dance-party scene) "stack" the drug Ecstasy with Ritalin to try to prolong a high.

Abuse of prescription drugs can lead to addiction, misdiagnosis of serious illness, life threatening circumstances, and even death. Taking drugs via injection makes it difficult for the user to control the intensity of the drugs effect, which makes toxic overdoses more likely. When drugs are prepared for injection by a street user, dust, dirt, and other contaminants can fall into the preparation, making them even more dangerous.

"Inert ingredients" that manufacturers include to increase the bulk of Ritalin tablets may be harmless when taken by mouth, but these ingredients (talc, cellulose, mineral oil, and sugars) can create serious problems when injected directly into veins or body tissues.

The complications from injection drug use include:

- drug overdoses
- blood clots
- infections (“blood poisoning,” abscesses, hepatitis, AIDS, etc.)
- scars (“tracks” and adhesions)
- pulmonary problems (permanent and irreversible lung tissue damage, “addict’s lung,” embolisms, etc.)
- skin and circulatory problems

Complications from snorting crushed Ritalin include:

- open sores
- nose bleeds
- deterioration of the nasal cartilage

The symptoms of someone who has taken high doses of stimulants such as Ritalin include:

- loss of appetite (may cause malnutrition)
- tremors and muscle twitching
- fevers, convulsions, and severe headaches
- irregular heartbeat and respiration (these may be life threatening)
- anxiety, restlessness
- paranoia, hallucinations, and delusions

- excessive repetition of movements and meaningless tasks
- formication (sensation of bugs or worms crawling under the skin)

The symptoms of Ritalin addiction include:

- drug addiction
- nervousness and insomnia
- loss of appetite
- nausea and vomiting
- dizziness
- headaches
- changes in heart rate and blood pressure (usually elevation of both, but occasionally depression)
- skin rashes and itching
- abdominal pain
- weight loss
- digestive problems
- toxic psychosis
- psychotic episodes
- severe depression upon withdrawal

Ritalin can be an effective treatment when used properly, if you have concerns that your child may be using Ritalin inappropriately, please contact the Clint Eastwood Youth Program.

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



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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

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