

# TIPS for TEENS

## SEDATIVES

### THE TRUTH ABOUT SEDATIVES

**SLANG: BENZOS/PHENNIES/  
RED BIRDS/REDS/YELLOW  
JACKETS/ YELLOWS/DOWNERS/  
SLEEPING PILLS/TRANKS<sup>1</sup>**

## GET THE FACTS

**SEDATIVES CAN BE ADDICTIVE.** Although sedatives are often used to treat insomnia, they can be harmful when taken in ways other than as prescribed by a doctor, such as to self-medicate for depression or anxiety. Long-term use may result in needing larger doses to achieve the desired sedation and calming effects, which can lead to addiction.<sup>2</sup> In some cases it is possible to misjudge how much more is needed, leading to overdose.

**SEDATIVES CAN HARM YOUR BODY.** It's possible to overdose on sedatives. When someone overdoses on sedatives, their breathing often slows or stops, which decreases the amount of oxygen that reaches the brain. This can cause short- and long-term effects on the nervous system, including coma, permanent brain damage, and even death.<sup>3</sup>

**SEDATIVES CAN BE DEADLY.** When mixed with alcohol, sedatives slow heart rate and breathing even more, which can lead to death.<sup>4</sup> Alcohol and sedatives work synergistically, meaning their efforts are much more potent than when they are used separately.

## ? Q&A

**Q. IF I HAVE BEEN TAKING SEDATIVES EVERY DAY FOR A FEW WEEKS OR LONGER, IS IT SAFE TO STOP TAKING SEDATIVES WHENEVER I WANT?**

**A. NO.** Talk to your doctor. Withdrawal symptoms can be life-threatening and include seizures, increased heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature, as well as visual hallucinations.<sup>5</sup>

**Q. AREN'T SEDATIVES LESS DANGEROUS THAN OTHER DRUGS?**

**A. NO.** In fact, sedative overdoses have increased. A recent study showed that the most commonly prescribed sedatives called benzodiazepines were responsible for nearly 30 percent of deaths from medications.<sup>6</sup>

**Q. ARE SEDATIVES LESS HARMFUL THAN DRINKING?**

**A. NO.** The effects of sedatives can be harmful and are similar to alcohol intoxication. Symptoms include impaired attention and judgment, inappropriate behavior, decreased reflexes, and lack of balance when walking.<sup>7</sup>

### THE BOTTOM LINE:

Even when used as directed, sedatives carry risk. But when misused, sedatives are more dangerous and can even be deadly. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust if you have questions.

### LEARN MORE:

Get the latest information on how drugs affect the brain and body at [teens.drugabuse.gov](https://teens.drugabuse.gov).

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SEDATIVES, CONTACT:

**SAMHSA**  
1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) (English and Español)

TTY 1-800-487-4889

[www.samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)  
[store.samhsa.gov](https://store.samhsa.gov)



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration



# BEFORE YOU RISK IT!

1

**KNOW THE LAW.** It is illegal to use sedatives without a valid prescription, or to give or sell them to others.<sup>8</sup>

2

**KNOW THE RISKS.** Even if you have a prescription for sedatives, it is unsafe to use them with other depressants, especially alcohol. Even taking them with some over-the-counter cold and allergy medications could heighten their effects and have deadly consequences.<sup>9</sup>

3

**LOOK AROUND YOU.** Even if you think your peers are effectively using sedatives to cope with depression or anxiety, the truth is that a very small number of teens are misusing the substances in this way. In 2018, approximately 0.3 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 misused prescription sedatives in the past year.<sup>10</sup>



## MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR FOR RESOURCES USED IN THIS

**"TIPS for TEENS,"**

visit [store.samhsa.gov](http://store.samhsa.gov) or call  
**1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)**  
(English and Español).

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**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration



# KNOW THE SIGNS

How can you tell if a friend is using sedatives? Potential side effects and symptoms include:<sup>11</sup>

- **Drowsiness**
- **Slurred speech**
- **Poor concentration**
- **Confusion**
- **Dizziness**
- **Problems with movement and memory**
- **Slowed breathing**



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS MISUSING SEDATIVES?

### BE A FRIEND. SAVE A LIFE.

Encourage your friend to stop using or seek help from a parent, teacher, or other caring adult.

For 24/7 free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at:

**1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)**

or visit the SAMHSA Treatment Services Locator at [findtreatment.gov](http://findtreatment.gov)

<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts#CNSdepressants>

<sup>2,3</sup> NIDA. (2018). Prescription CNS Depressants. *Drug Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-cns-depressants>

<sup>4</sup> NIDA. (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts>

<sup>5</sup> NIDA. (2018). Prescription CNS Depressants. *Drug Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-cns-depressants>

<sup>6,7</sup> Weaver, M. F. (2015). Prescription sedative misuse and abuse. *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*, 88(3), 247-256.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. (2013). Prescription Drugs Fast Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs5/5140/5140p.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> NIDA. (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts>

<sup>10</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2019). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed tables*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-detailed-tables>

<sup>11</sup> NIDA. (2019). Central Nervous System Depressants. *Commonly Abused Drug Charts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts>