Ritalin

Ritalin, the trade name for methylphenidate, is a medication prescribed primarily for individuals who have attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Most ADHD symptoms improve during adolescence or adulthood, but the disorder can persist or begin in adulthood. It has been estimated that 3-7 percent of school-age children have ADHD. Ritalin also is prescribed occasionally for treating narcolepsy.

Ritalin is a central nervous system stimulant with effects similar to, but more potent than, caffeine and less potent than amphetamines. It has a notably calming and "focusing" effect on those with ADHD, particularly children. The therapeutic effects of Ritalin are achieved by slow and steady increases of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which is produced naturally by the brain. The doses prescribed by physicians start low and increase very slowly until a therapeutic effect is reached. That way, the risk of addiction is very small. Common adverse reactions to taking Ritalin are nervousness, insomnia, skin rash, fever, nausea, dizziness, headache, cardiac arrhythmia, and severe depression upon withdrawal.

In recent years, Ritalin has been abused by people for whom it was not prescribed. Ritalin is abused primarily for its stimulant effects: appetite suppression, wakefulness, increased attentiveness, and euphoria. Tablets are either taken orally or crushed and snorted; some abusers dissolve the tablets in water and inject the mixture. Addiction to Ritalin seems to occur when it induces rapid increases in the brain of the neurotransmitter dopamine. Abuse of Ritalin can lead to increased tolerance and severe psychic dependence. Ritalin is a stimulant like other ADD/ADHD-prescribed drugs such as Adderall, Dexedrine and Concerta. It is important to note that it is a FELONY to possess Ritalin or similar medications without a valid prescription.

Production of Ritalin has increased almost six-fold since 1990, and the U.S. consumes five-times more Ritalin than the rest of the world!

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Recent Trends

- The 2005 Monitoring the Future Survey indicated that 2.4 percent of eighth-graders, and 4.4 percent of high school seniors report abusing Ritalin.

- Rates of collegiate stimulant abuse are highest among men, Whites (5 percent versus 2 percent for African-Americans, and 1 percent for Asians); fraternity/sorority members (9 percent versus 4 percent for nonmembers); students earning lower grades (5 percent for grade point averages of “B” or lower versus 3 percent for “B+” or higher), and at schools in the Northeast (2004 Monitoring the Future, and 2001 College Alcohol Study).

- In a 2006 article published in Pharmacotherapy, 4,580 college students were surveyed about their illicit use of prescription stimulants. Lifetime prevalence was 8 percent, and the past-year rate was 6 percent. The most commonly reported motives for illicit use were to help with concentration (65%), to increase alertness (48%), and experimentation (30%). More than 95 percent reported oral administration.

- A study by the University of Michigan Substance Abuse Research Center found that people who misuse prescription stimulants generally have higher rates of alcohol, cigarette, cocaine, and other substance abuse.

- In a 2001 survey, 34 percent of high school students who were prescribed ADD/ADHD medications had been approached to sell their prescription (Moline & Frankenberger).

- Medco Health Solutions reported that spending on ADHD drugs increased from $759 million in 2000 to $3.1 billion in 2004.

**RESOURCES**

**KSU Counseling Services**
English/Counseling Services Bldg.
Phone: 532-6927

**KSU Alcohol & Other Drug Education Service**
Director: Bill Arck
214 English/Counseling Services Bldg.
Phone: 532-6927

**Alcoholics Anonymous**
Noon Meeting (Mon.-Sat.)
Blue Valley United Methodist Church
835 Church Ave.
Phone: 537-9260