Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Over the Counter Drugs: What Parents Need to Know!

Do your children have access to over the counter (OTC) medications in your home? Can they get OTC medications from a friend? There might not seem to be any harm in kids taking a pain reliever or cough medicine, but children as young as 12 are using these medications for non-medical purposes. There is a rising trend in teen drug use and the abuse of over the counter (OTC) drugs, particularly in kids ages 13-16. With so many things parents already have to worry about, how can they protect their children from something so easily accessible? The key is to get educated! Be aware of the problem, which drugs are popular, and learn what warning signs to watch out for.

Why OTC Drugs?

Self-medicating: Kids are drawn to OTC drugs for several reasons. They could be using them to relieve anxiety, pain, and stress or simply to get high.

Easy Access: Kids usually do not have to look far or commit any Illegal acts to get these drugs. Instead of buying drugs illegally from friends or on the street, they can simply go to the nearest medicine cabinet.

Drug Name	Description	Side Effects
DXM	Ingredient found in cough medicine, or syrup like Vicks, Robitussin or Nyquil	Distorted vision, slurred speech, rapid heart beat, nausea, hallucinations
Diet Pills	Diet pills, laxatives or diuretics to help with weight loss	Nervous tremors, increased heart rate, digestive problems, heart failure
Pain Relievers	Pain relievers like acetaminophen or Ibuprofen are often “overused” when the directed dosage does not appear to be working, or if the medicine also contains caffeine it can cause a “buzz” or high	Acute liver failure if mixed with alcohol, stomach bleeding, kidney failure
Motion Sickness	Normally used to prevent motion sickness i.e. Dramamine	Hallucinations

© 2026 LifeWorks (US) Ltd.

Sexual Performance Pills	Pills sold as “dietary supplements” in gas stations and drug stores that are meant to enhance sexual performance. Most often taken to counter-act the effects of alcohol on sexual performance	Low blood pressure, heart attack

What Can *You* Do?

First, talk to your kids. Most parents already know they should talk to their kids about illegal drugs. You also need to talk to your kids about safe use of OTC drugs. Since these drugs are over the counter and often perceived as safe, children are unaware of the severe health risks. Lastly, keep track of which OTC drugs you have and how much. Don’t be afraid to ask questions if you notice any are missing.

Remember: Talking to your kids or teens about drug use can be difficult. The EAP is here to help. If you suspect your child may be abusing drugs, or would like more information about drug use call 800.272.2727 where counselors are available 24/7.