



Over the Counter Drug Abuse by Teens and Young Adults

by Balboa Horizons | October 5, 2017

Just because they're legal, doesn't mean they are safe from abuse. (OTC) Over the Counter drug abuse by teens and young adults is at an alarming rate, all chasing a "legal high." Approximately **1 out of every 11** teens has abused some sort of OTC medicine while abuse of OTC drugs is most common among young teens ranging from ages 13 to 16.

With increased accessibility and a lack of legal barriers, teens are able to secure OTC drugs easier than illicit drugs. Parents and teens alike are often lulled into a false sense of security that these products offer.

About 70% of parents report discussing the risks of marijuana use with their children, but only 33% have discussed OTC cough or cold medication use (**AAFP**).

Make no mistake, these products can lead to dangerous addiction and long-term effects.

Caffeine: Caffeine is likely the most common and the most overlooked. The number of teenagers drinking caffeinated beverages has **caffeine">tripled** since the 1970's. While we may approach caffeine casually, both addiction and dependence can occur.

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In excess, energy drinks, caffeine pills, even too much coffee can have an adverse effect on the developing mind and body. Too much caffeine can cause:

- nervousness
- insomnia
- restlessness
- irritability
- accelerated heartbeat
- stomach upset
- frequent urination
- anxiety
- muscle tremors
- headaches
- irritability
- jitteriness

Heavy users can even experience withdrawals if caffeine is consumed regularly enough.

DXM: Dextromethorphan (also known as DXM) is a cough suppressant found in many brands of OTC cold medications, including Robitussin and Coricidin.

According to a 2014 study by the University of Michigan, **4.1%** of twelfth graders report abusing cough syrup within the past year. Consumed in excess, DXM can produce a high sensation and hallucinations and can be extremely dangerous in excessive amounts.

This is a process known as “robo-tripping” or “skittling” and can lead to overdose. Other long-term effects include **cognitive dysfunction and impaired memory**.

While several states have restrictions in place to keep minors from purchasing cough medicines in store, they can easily access it online and in your medicine cabinet.

Pain relievers: While there is a growing concern around opioid-based painkillers, OTC painkillers remain a concern as well. While the use of acetaminophen and ibuprofen may not result in a “high,” many teens and young adults take too many in hopes of getting the medicine to work faster. However, large doses of acetaminophen can lead to liver failure, stomach bleeding, kidney failure, and cardiac risks.

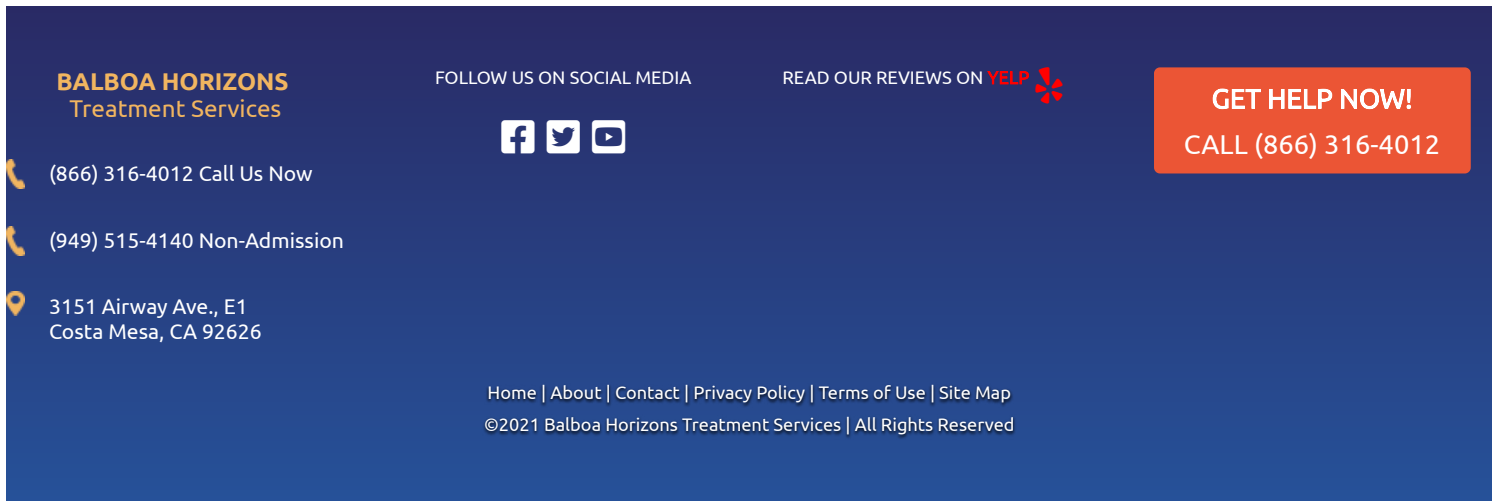
Diet pills: Ingredients in diet pills can pose a real risk. Large doses can lead to digestive problems, hair loss, insomnia, anxiety, irritability, extreme

paranoia, blurred vision, kidney problems, and dehydration. Diet pills hold a particular danger as abuse can often be linked with an eating disorder. This co-morbidity must be treated.

No matter the substance, the signs of abuse are typically consistent: confusion, hostility, poor coordination, anxiety, constant mood changes, nausea and dizziness, a lack of interest in activities that they always have enjoyed, or a sudden drop in academic performance.

Just because these products play a role in everyday life, doesn't mean they can't be destructive. If you suspect Over the Counter Drug Abuse by Teens, do not hesitate to get them treatment at our **OTC Drugs Rehabilitation Center**

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