
THE TRUTH ABOUT
RITALIN ABUSE
TAKE 1
MORNING
RITALIN
R-ball
Rids
Smarties
drugfreeworld.org

WHY THIS BOOKLET WAS PRODUCED

You hear a lot of talk about drugs these days—at school, in the streets, on the internet and TV. Some of it is true, some not.

What you may not know is that much of what you hear about drugs actually comes from those selling them. Former dealers have said they would tell people anything to get them to buy drugs.

You need the real facts and the truth about drugs so you can make an informed decision about them. That is why we have prepared this booklet—for you.

Your feedback is important to us, so let us know what you think about this booklet. Visit us at **DrugFreeWorld.org** and email us at **info@drugfreeworld.org**.



What Is Ritalin?

Ritalin, one of the first so-called "study drugs," is the common name for *methylphenidate*, a drug classified by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as a Schedule II substance—the same category as cocaine, morphine and amphetamines.* It is often abused by teens for its stimulant effects.

Even when prescribed, Ritalin can cause serious side effects, including nervousness, insomnia, loss of appetite, pulse changes, heart problems and weight loss. The manufacturer warns that users may become dependent on it.

As Ritalin abuse spread, many other "study drugs" like Adderall, Concerta, Metadate, Dexedrine, Focalin and Vyvanse entered the market. These drugs, also stimulants, have similar effects. By 2020, Adderall—a mix of two types of amphetamine—was abused more often than Ritalin.



The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a public health warning that Ritalin and drugs like it may cause hallucinations, suicidal thoughts, psychotic behavior, aggression and violence.

* amphetamine: a powerful central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) stimulant, often called *speed*



Street Names for Ritalin

- Diet Coke
- Kiddie Cocaine
- Kiddie Coke
- Poor Man's Cocaine
- R-ball
- Rids
- Skittles
- Smarties
- Vitamin R

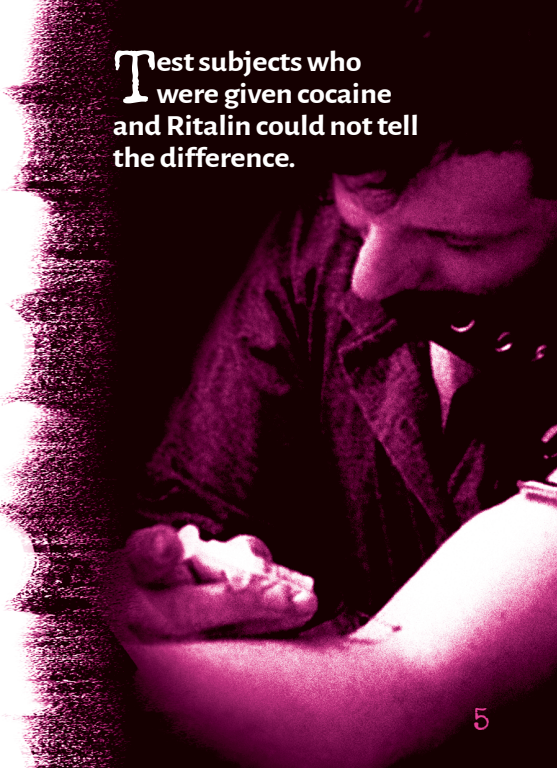
Poor Man's Cocaine

A drug enforcement official testified before Congress about the effects of ADHD drugs and cited studies on both animals and humans who were given cocaine and Ritalin. The test subjects could not tell the difference between the two. The official concluded that, "They produce effects that are nearly identical."

Ritalin, Adderall and similar drugs are easy to get, and they are inexpensive. Pills are often taken from someone's prescription, stolen or obtained fraudulently, then sold for $1 to $20 each.

As these drugs are stimulants, they are chemically similar to cocaine. When injected as a liquid, they deliver a powerful rush that addicts crave.

Test subjects who were given cocaine and Ritalin could not tell the difference.



Some Facts about "Study Drugs"



Ritalin comes in pill form. The 5 mg tablets of Ritalin are pale yellow, 10 mg tablets are pale green and the 20 mg tablets are either white or pale yellow. All are stamped with numbers indicating the dosage.

There are many different forms and dosages of Adderall, Concerta and Vyvanse.

"Study drugs" stimulate (raise the activity of) the body's nervous system. However, even the manufacturers admit that no one really knows how these drugs work: "The mode of action in man is not completely understood."

Abusers grind the tablets into a powder and snort it. The drug is water-soluble, making it easy to convert into a liquid that can be injected.

As noted by the DEA, "Pharmaceutical products diverted from legitimate channels are the only sources of methylphenidate available for abuse." In other words, every tablet of the drug that is abused originated from the manufacturer—none of it is made on the streets.





Now I have built up a tolerance to taking two to three 20 mg pills to get the high. I recognize my dependence. I have become 'cracked-out' or zombielike." —Alex

Finding "Study Drugs"



Unfortunately, Ritalin, Adderall and all the other drugs prescribed for difficulty focusing and hyperactivity can be found almost anywhere. If you are in high school or college, you are likely to have a large supply readily to hand, with pushers (your fellow students) eager to make an easy profit from you.

In some schools, as many as 25 percent of the students take one of these drugs regularly. The Drug Enforcement Administration found that many schools had more of these drugs than the neighborhood pharmacy.

Why is study drug abuse so common? It is all too easy for a "friend" to take some of his little brother's prescription pills and turn around and sell them at $5 a pop.

Or a student eager for a quick fix tells a school nurse he has a "study disorder" and "can't concentrate." He gets a prescription and stocks up on the pills for future use, handing out extras to his friends.

While the law forbids unrestricted distribution of these powerful stimulants,* the sad fact remains that these substances are freely available almost anywhere. Kiddie cocaine, as it has been called, is handed out like candy.

* stimulant: a drug that increases immediate energy and alertness, but that is accompanied by increases in blood pressure, heart rate and breathing



The symptoms of almost an overdose kick in. The person gets very hyper, hypersensitive, hyperalert, with very intense mood swings. It's crazy." —Jake



How Abuse Starts

It seems so simple at first. A student gets a little behind in his studies. An exam comes up and he needs to prepare. He'll have to stay up late to have even a chance of making the grade. Coffee gives him the jitters, but many of his friends use these pills to give them the extra energy they need. Why not? A couple of bucks; one pill; an entire night of study; a feeling of "focus."

That may be where it starts, but it is often not where it ends.

Some students chop up Ritalin and snort it like cocaine for faster absorption. "It keeps you awake for hours," said one user.

Just like cocaine or any other stimulant, that "up"

feeling is inevitably followed by a crash, a feeling of fatigue, depression and decreased alertness. One student on Adderall recounted that a feeling of "utmost clarity" turned into a state of being "crashed out and overdone" the next day. As another user put it, "I usually go into a crash coma afterward."

And, of course, the user soon comes to know that this crashed-out feeling can be relieved with the "help" of another pill that gets him back up again. And so it goes.

Next it may be larger doses or snorting it for a bigger rush. Tolerance increases, so the person has to use more. In larger doses, Ritalin, Adderall and other stimulants can lead to convulsions, headaches and hallucinations. The powerful amphetaminelike substance can even lead to death, as in the many tragic cases of children who have died of heart attacks caused by damage linked to these drugs.

I first tried Ritalin when I was in 7th grade. It was prescribed to me—they thought I had slight ADD [attention deficit disorder] because I pretended to so I could have an excuse for not doing well in school. I never realized that I was getting myself addicted, and then I was no different than any other habitual drug user.

"I took about 40 mg a day and I felt it put me at the top of my game. I would stay up for days in a row, to the point I suffered a severe psychotic episode. It was terrifying! Everything seemed to be melting and morphing, and I was terrified." —Andrea

The Vicious Effects of Prescription Stimulants

These amphetaminelike substances cause the same effects on the body as other forms of speed—loss of appetite, insomnia, increased heart rate. The abuse of these drugs in larger doses, especially through injection or snorting, puts an even greater strain on the body. The stress on the heart can be fatal.

Take the case of a teenager, a long-term user of Ritalin, who collapsed one day while skateboarding—dead of a heart attack.

An injection of Ritalin has an additional, destructive effect on the body. While the chemical compound methylphenidate dissolves completely in water, the tablets also contain tiny particles of insoluble fillers. These solid materials block the small blood vessels when injected into the bloodstream, causing serious damage to the lungs and to the eyes.

Aside from the physical impact, there are also severe emotional conditions caused by even short-term use of this drug. Hallucinations and psychotic behavior are not uncommon.

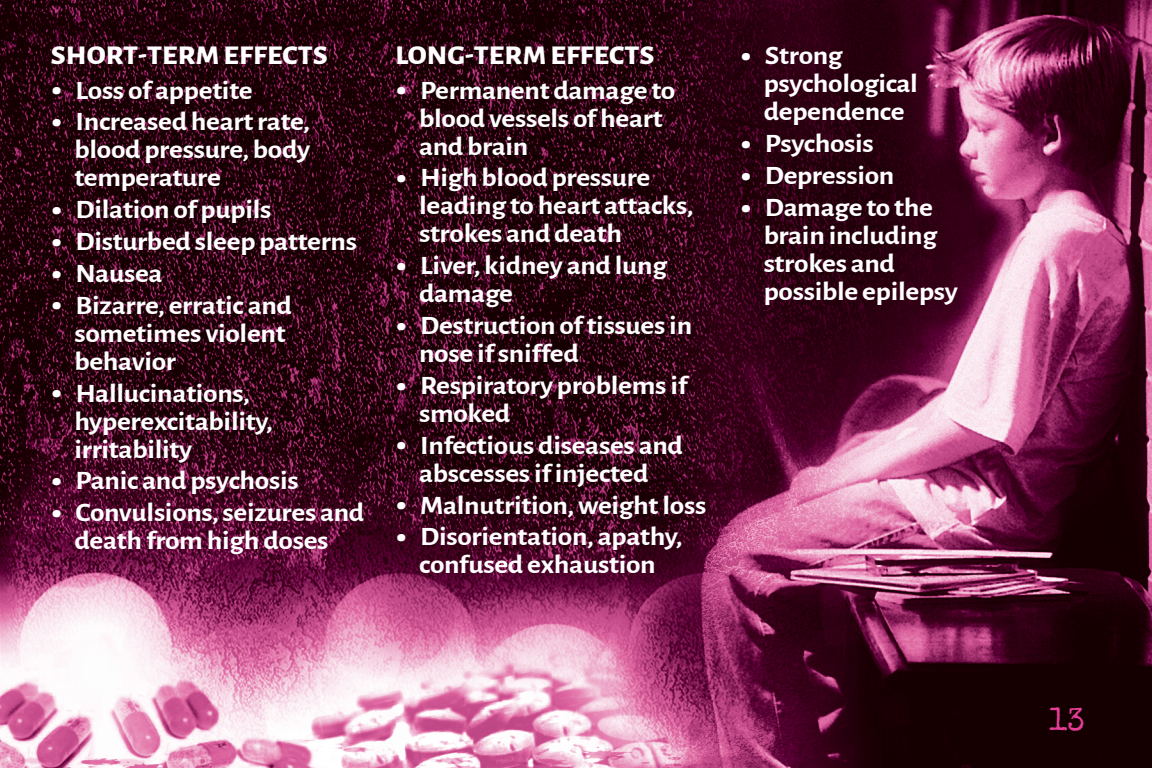
A researcher in Texas found that every one of a dozen children "treated" with Ritalin experienced genetic abnormalities associated with an increased risk of cancer.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

- Loss of appetite
- Increased heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature
- Dilation of pupils
- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Nausea
- Bizarre, erratic and sometimes violent behavior
- Hallucinations, hyperexcitability, irritability
- Panic and psychosis
- Convulsions, seizures and death from high doses

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

- Permanent damage to blood vessels of heart and brain
- High blood pressure leading to heart attacks, strokes and death
- Liver, kidney and lung damage
- Destruction of tissues in nose if sniffed
- Respiratory problems if smoked
- Infectious diseases and abscesses if injected
- Malnutrition, weight loss
- Disorientation, apathy, confused exhaustion
- Strong psychological dependence
- Psychosis
- Depression
- Damage to the brain including strokes and possible epilepsy



"Study Drugs" Lead to Other Drugs



Use of Ritalin and other stimulants builds up tolerance, which can lead to taking stronger drugs to achieve the same high.

These drugs themselves do not lead the person to other drugs. People take drugs to get rid of unwanted situations or feelings. The drug masks the problem for a time (while the user is high). When the high

KURT'S STORY: Rock legend Kurt Cobain started on Ritalin at age seven. Cobain's widow, Courtney Love, believed that this drug led to his later abuse of stronger drugs. He committed suicide in 1994. Love was also prescribed Ritalin as a child. She described the experience this way: "When you're a kid and you get this drug that makes you feel that [euphoric] feeling, where else are you going to turn when you're an adult?"

fades, the problem, unwanted condition or situation returns more intensely than before. The user may then turn to stronger drugs since the stimulant "no longer works."

A study from the National Institutes of Health found that nonmedical users of stimulants were more likely to abuse other drugs and have a substance use disorder. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that, when youth misuse prescription drugs, they have a higher risk of mental health problems and suicide and are more inclined to violence.

Common Justifications

(Don't fall into the trap):

There are many justifications for taking these powerful drugs. Recognize them for what they are—lies!

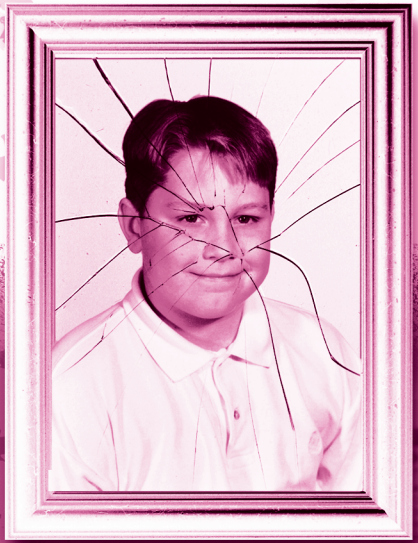
- **Everyone is using it.**
- **It's just for study.**
- **My brother takes it for a learning disorder. It can't be that bad.**
- **It's not addictive.**
- **You can control it. You don't have to use it again if you don't want to.**

Don't let others—including your friends—lead you into the trap.

DEATH from Ritalin

High doses of Ritalin lead to similar symptoms to other stimulant abuse, including tremors and muscle twitching, paranoia* and a sensation of bugs or worms crawling under the skin.

One 17-year-old, after snorting crushed Ritalin pills and staying awake for days, went psychotic, killed his parents and severely injured his brothers and sister with a hatchet.



MATTHEW'S STORY:

Matthew was a teenager who had been on Ritalin for seven years. He died suddenly in March 2000. Although he had no history of heart problems, the autopsy revealed clear signs of small-vessel damage. His parents were told by one of the medical examiners that the heart of a healthy, fully grown man weighs about 350 grams. Matthew's heart weighed 402 grams. His death certificate reads: "Death caused from long-term use of methylphenidate (Ritalin)."

* paranoia: extreme and unreasonable suspicion, distrust or fear of other people without evidence or justification

A 21-year-old Tennessee college student began abusing Adderall and became increasingly paranoid. His downward spiral ended when he stepped in front of a passenger train and ended his life.

Even the Food and Drug Administration warning label on Adderall states that abuse "can result in overdose and death."

IT'S A CRIME TO ABUSE IT

In the United States, improper use of a prescription stimulant is subject to severe criminal penalties. The penalties for a first trafficking offense (which you would be guilty of even if you just shared one or two pills with a friend) includes up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to $1 million.

If trafficking results in death or serious injury, it's 20 years to life.



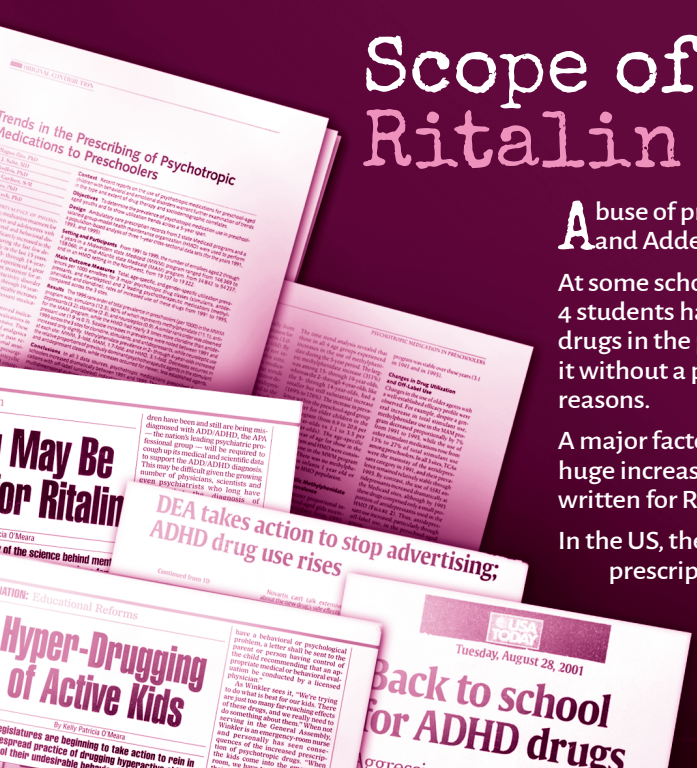
I realize that my interest in and resulting dependence on speed started when I was prescribed Ritalin. At first it was every weekend. Then it was every day.

"I began to get hallucinations of birds flying overhead, feelings of people in the same room as me when I was alone and the beginnings of paranoia. I used up [my friend's] entire Dexedrine prescription within a week. Then I went back to my Ritalin and went on from there.

"I don't remember much of 12th grade. But I do remember overwhelming depression and an inability to understand exactly what was the reason I was doing worse than ever in school. I barely graduated and made absolutely no college plans.

"At the last minute, I enrolled in the local college. I was able to stay clean for about 17 days before the need for speed overcame all. I attended class for one week and failed miserably." —Sam

Scope of Ritalin Abuse



Abuse of prescription drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall is increasing.

At some schools, as many as 1 out of every 4 students has illegally abused one of these drugs in the past year, meaning they used it without a prescription or for nonmedical reasons.

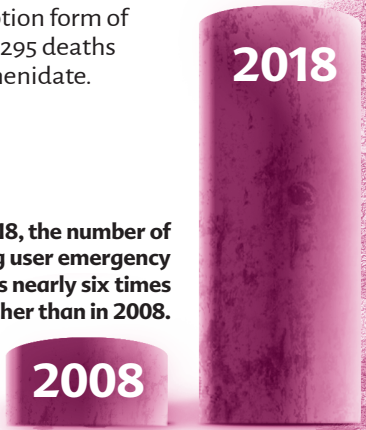
A major factor contributing to the abuse is the huge increase in the number of prescriptions written for Ritalin and other stimulants.

In the US, the number of stimulant prescriptions soared from around 5 million in 1991 to nearly 35 million in 2007. They continued rising to 79 million in 2022.

The number of people visiting an emergency room because of their use of one of these drugs was almost six times as high as the number going to the ER a decade prior.

In an eight-year period, there were 8,240 deaths in the US involving a prescription form of amphetamine and 295 deaths involving methylphenidate.

In 2018, the number of stimulant drug user emergency room visits was nearly six times higher than in 2008.



I ended up doing a lot of stronger amphetamines that brought me down pretty quick, and I don't know if I would have gotten interested in them if I hadn't started using Ritalin." —Andy



The Truth About Drugs

Drugs are essentially poisons. The amount taken determines the effect.

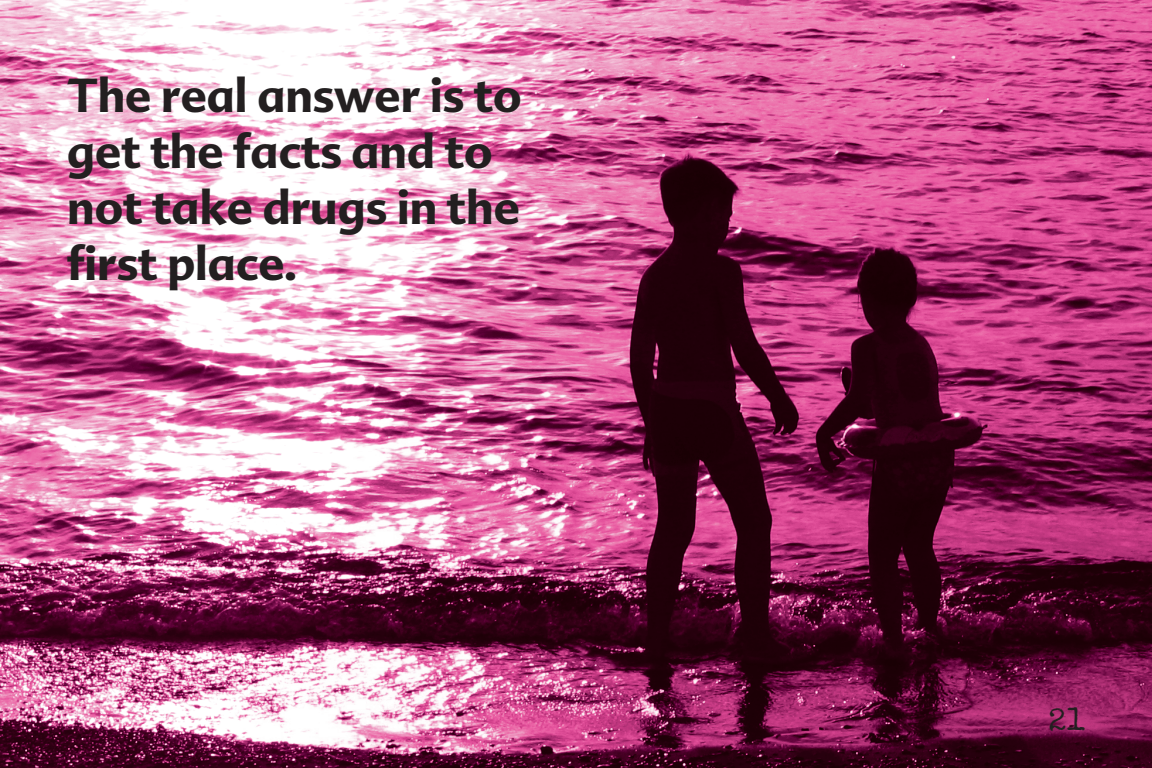
A small amount acts as a stimulant (speeds you up). A greater amount acts as a sedative (slows you down). An even larger amount poisons and can kill.

This is true of any drug. Only the amount needed to achieve the effect differs.

But many drugs have another liability: they directly affect the mind. They can distort the user's perception of what is happening around him or her. As a result, the person's actions may be odd, irrational, inappropriate and even destructive.

Drugs block off all sensations, the desirable ones along with the undesirable. So, while providing short-term help in the relief of pain, they also wipe out ability and alertness and muddy one's thinking.

Medicines are drugs that are intended to speed up, slow down or change something about the way your body is working to try to make it work better. Sometimes they are necessary. But they are still drugs: they act as stimulants or sedatives, and too much can kill you. So if you do not use medicines as they are supposed to be used, they can be as dangerous as illegal drugs.


The real answer is to get the facts and to not take drugs in the first place.

WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

People take drugs because they want to change something in their lives.

Here are some of the reasons young people have given for taking drugs:

- To fit in
- To escape or relax
- To relieve boredom
- To seem grown-up
- To rebel
- To experiment

They think drugs are a solution. But eventually, drugs become the problem.

Difficult as it may be to face one's problems, the consequences of drug use are always worse than the problem one is trying to solve with them. The real answer is to get the facts and to not take drugs in the first place.



Millions of copies of booklets such as this have been distributed to people around the world in over 20 languages.



As new drugs appear on the streets and more information about their effects becomes known, existing booklets are updated and new ones created.

The booklets are published by the Foundation for a Drug-Free World, a nonprofit public benefit organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

The foundation provides educational materials, advice and coordination for its international drug prevention network. It works with youth, parents, educators, volunteer organizations and government agencies—anyone with an interest in helping people lead lives free from drug abuse.

REFERENCES:

For the references used to compile this booklet, go to DrugFreeWorld.org/refs.

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FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

This booklet is one in a series of publications that covers the facts about marijuana, alcohol, fentanyl, synthetic drugs, Ecstasy, cocaine, crack cocaine, crystal meth and methamphetamine, inhalants, heroin, LSD and prescription drug abuse. Armed with this information, the reader can make the decision to live a drug-free life.

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