

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Ritalin® and Adderall® Abused by Students as Party Drugs and Study Aids

What are Ritalin® and Adderall®? Ritalin® (methylphenidate hydrochloride) and Adderall® (amphetamine) are prescription drugs used to treat patients who suffer from attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), and narcolepsy. When taken appropriately, these stimulants help people remain awake and sustain concentration and energy levels.

What are the slang names? Ritalin® is known among users as R-ball, vitamin R, JIF, MPH, kiddie cocaine, West Coast, skippy, and the smart drug. While there are no known slang terms for Adderall®, it may be referred to by an amphetamine slang name such as speed or uppers.

How are Ritalin® and Adderall® abused? Ritalin® and Adderall® abusers can take the drugs orally as tablets or crush the tablets, creating a powder which can either be snorted or dissolved and injected. The drugs may also be mixed with other drugs or alcohol to increase and sustain the effects of the other substances.

What are the effects? Ritalin® and Adderall® abuse can result in agitation, tremors, euphoria, increased or irregular heart rate, hypertension, sleeplessness, and a loss of appetite. More extreme effects include manic or psychotic episodes, paranoid delusions, hallucinations, and, in rare instances, death. Repeated abuse can result in addiction.

Who abuses these drugs? Ritalin® and Adderall® abusers tend to be middle and upper-middle class high school and college students. Some use the drugs as party drugs, seeking a high. Other abusers—typically college students—take these drugs to stay awake and remain focused while trying to study. A 2002 national survey found that 3%-5% of students in grades 8, 10, and 12 reported using Ritalin® without medical supervision at least once in the past year (NIDA, 2003). And a 2001 University of Michigan study found that 3% of undergraduates had used Ritalin® in the past year without a prescription (Teter et al. 2003).

How are they obtained? Unlawful acquisition of these drugs usually occurs through theft (from individuals, schools, or pharmacies) or purchase from persons who have been prescribed the medications. Students who take the drugs for medical purposes have been known to sell their unused extra pills, at a rate ranging from \$2 to \$20 per pill. A survey of middle and high school students in two midwestern states found that 34% of the students legally taking ADHD medications reported being approached to sell or trade their medications (Moline and Frankenberger, 2001). The Drug Enforcement Administration notes the pills are available on the street and through smuggling rings, as well.

Are they illegal substances? Both drugs are classified as Schedule II Drugs under the federal Controlled Substance Abuse Act. Purchase, sale, or possession of these drugs without a prescription is a felony.

SOURCES: A complete list of sources is available at www.cesar.umd.edu.

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