

It's Academic.....or is it?

'Enhancing' Academic Performance with Drugs

With increasing academic demands, high school and college youth are finding new ways to enhance their academic performance. This includes the use of substances as a form of "academic steroids" to improve their performance during classes and examinations. These "academic steroids" or "study drugs" are prescription pills used in the treatment of attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy.

The ADD and ADHD medications that are being abused as study aids are methylphenidate (Ritalin) and amphetamine (Adderall). These drugs are known as stimulants and act on the brain by increasing levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine. Many of the effects of these drugs deceive users and make it seem as though the drugs are beneficial. Stimulants such as Ritalin and Adderall cause a person to have a decreased need for sleep, an increased ability to concentrate and an increase in motivation to do work. All of these effects may seem beneficial to students who want to study for longer hours, increase their motivation to study and increase their concentration so that they can retain more information.

These drugs are popular because they are highly accessible; students who abuse stimulants generally get the drug from friends and other students who have legitimate prescriptions for Ritalin or Adderall. As well, they are also perceived to be safe because they come from a doctor and are used by many individuals for actual health problems. However, the perceived benefits of drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall as safe study aids is very misleading. Taking these drugs without a prescription, and taking them in increased dosages or frequencies, puts the individuals at a great risk. Abusing prescriptions such as Ritalin and Adderall puts the individual at risk for seizures, coma and death resulting from blood vessels in the brain bursting, and may exacerbate any underlying heart conditions or cause heart failure.

The use and misuse of stimulant drugs to enhance academic performance show that many students feel the need to go to whatever lengths possible to succeed. The issue of the abuse of stimulants as study aids needs to be addressed so that youth can realize that there are other ways to achieve academic success that do not involve the use of drugs. Time management, effective study habits and stress-relieving skills should be taught to students, as well as providing a supportive environment to help individuals find other ways to get good grades and achieve success in school situations. If youth use stimulant drugs to get an edge throughout their school career, they will find that in the workforce, they may be lacking the skills necessary to cope with their workload and to do their job with quality.