

Adderall abuse causes physical, psychological problems

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Spencer Millsap/Star photo illustration

Illegal prescription drug use has popped its way into student life.

According to a November 2006 Texas State University CORE Alcohol and Drug Survey, 20 percent of students reported using medication in ways not prescribed by a doctor and 31 percent admitted mixing alcohol and drugs — legal or illegal — at least two to three times per year.

Adderall is one of the drugs health professionals report seeing students use to help them through school.

Julie Eckert, peer education coordinator for the Alcohol and Drug Resource Center, said students who take Adderall, with or without a prescription, use it for its ability to enhance concentration and focus for long periods, which they find helpful for studying or writing papers.

Adderall, an amphetamine and a Schedule II controlled substance, is a prescription drug designed to treat Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, better known as ADHD, according to a published report by Eckert.

According to WebMD, amphetamines are a group of drugs that act by increasing levels of norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine in the brain, raising heart rate and blood pressure.

In a joint e-mail statement, Ashlee Dozier, health education coordinator for the Student Health Center, and Lenore DePagter, physician, said Adderall is a mixture of four amphetamine salts.

"Dopamine causes you to focus your attention," Dozier and DePagter said. "Amphetamines — taken inappropriately and in nontherapeutic doses — can have an opposite effect, interfering with the ability to focus and can also cause harmful side effects."

Eckert reported other Schedule II controlled substances include opium, morphine and cocaine, and therefore lead to a high potential for abuse and addiction.

"Abusing the drug can lead to psychological and physical consequences including depression, nausea/vomiting, anxiety, moodiness, mental disturbances, impotence, tremors, dizziness, high blood pressure, fast heart beat, stroke, heart attack and insomnia," Dozier and DePagter said in the e-mail.

According to WebMD, Adderall is used to treat traumatic brain injury, the daytime drowsiness symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and narcolepsy and manage severe cases of treatment-resistant depression, besides ADHD.

"Long-term effects from misusing Adderall include stunted growth, psychotic episodes, heart complications and severe psychological and physical addiction," said Dozier and DePagter.

Shire Pharmaceuticals introduced the Adderall brand in 1996 in the form of a multi-dose, instant release tablet derived from an original formula of the weight management drug Obetrol, according to a Shire Pharmaceuticals press release. Shire Pharmaceuticals introduced Adderall XR in 2001, in an extended release formula.

Shawn Dullye, mass communication junior, said he takes 20 milligrams of Adderall XR once a day.

"I think Adderall has helped me a lot," Dullye said. "The normal Adderall, when it starts to wear off, has a coming down effect, and affects my sleep schedule depending on the time it's taken. The new Adderall keeps me up later, but it's harder to wake up."

Dullye said he was diagnosed with ADHD and started showing symptoms as a kid.

Eckert said not all Adderall users have prescriptions. She said a campus psychologist must evaluate students for them to obtain an Adderall prescription at the Student Health Center.

"Students sometimes have a low perception of harm with Adderall use because it is a prescription," Eckert said.

Adderall is a controlled substance, and its prescription and use is highly regulated by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Texas Department of Public Safety, according to the e-mail sent by Dozier and DePagter.

"Not only is possessing Adderall without a prescription a felony, but selling Adderall, whether or not you personally have a prescription for it, is also a felony," Dozier and DePagter said. "Felonies carry heavy penalties and jail time."

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