

Prescription Medication Misuse

When painkillers, sedatives or stimulants are used differently from how they were prescribed

Substance misuse can develop quietly. A substance may begin as a way to cope, sleep, socialise, manage pain, increase confidence or get through difficult feelings. This guide is here to help you notice patterns with curiosity rather than judgement.

What this means

Medication misuse can include taking a higher dose than prescribed, taking doses more frequently, using somebody else's medication, using it for a different effect, or combining it with alcohol or other substances.

Why it happens

Pain, insomnia, anxiety, trauma, pressure to perform and fear of symptoms returning can all contribute. Dependence can occur even when medication originally began as legitimate treatment.

Important risks

Some medicines cause sedation, impaired coordination, breathing problems, tolerance or withdrawal. Risks can rise sharply when sedating medicines are combined.

Safer next steps

A prescriber, pharmacist or GP can review the medication and help create a safer plan. Do not suddenly stop a medicine that can cause withdrawal without professional advice.

A gentle check-in

Ask yourself: What does this substance do for me? What happens before I use it? What happens afterwards? What has become harder because of it? What support would make change feel more possible?

Notice	Consider
Triggers, cravings, quantity, secrecy, sleep, mood and consequences.	GP support, local drug/alcohol services, counselling, trusted people and practical harm-reduction advice.

Important safety note

This resource is educational and does not replace medical assessment. Some substances can cause dangerous withdrawal or overdose. If there is unconsciousness, severe breathing difficulty, seizure, collapse, chest pain or immediate danger, seek emergency medical help.

You deserve support that looks at the whole person - not just the substance.