

KEY FINDINGS

- Students in their 5th year+ were the most likely among undergraduates to report ever having used pain medications for non-medical reasons (18.2%).
- 37.9% of undergraduate students who misused stimulants reported that they began misusing stimulants to study in their first year of college.
- 13.4% of graduate and professional students reported that they began misusing stimulants to study during graduate school.

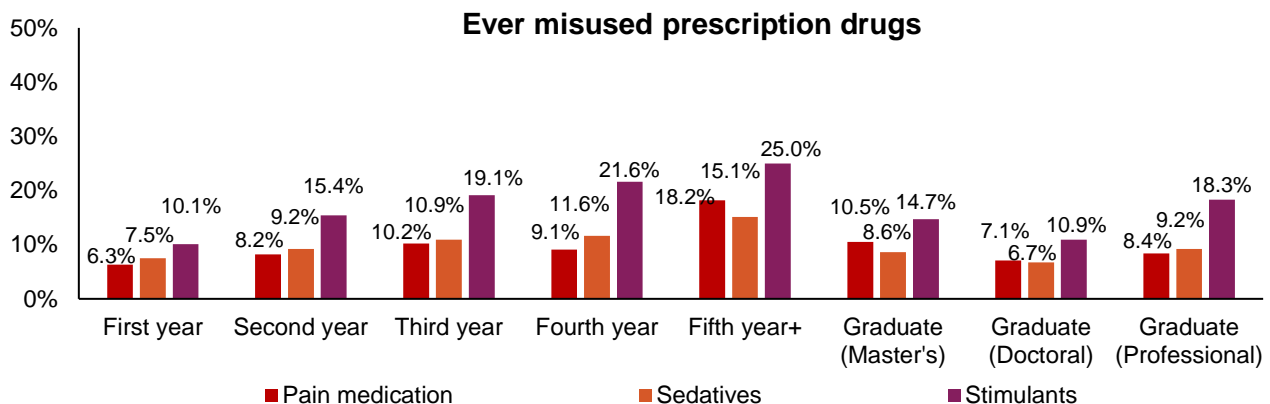
AN OVERVIEW OF NON-MEDICAL USE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS BY CLASS RANK

This report uses data from the 2018 administration of the College Prescription Drug Study (CPDS) to examine non-medical prescription drug use among college students. The CPDS surveyed students at 26 public and private, two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities; 19,539 students completed the survey. Of those who completed the survey, 1,773 (9.1%) students reported that they had ever used pain medications for non-medical reasons, 1,832 (9.4%) reported ever using sedatives for non-medical reasons, and 3,055 (15.9%) reported ever using stimulants for non-medical reasons. This report summarizes a comparison of various survey responses by class rank.

FINDINGS

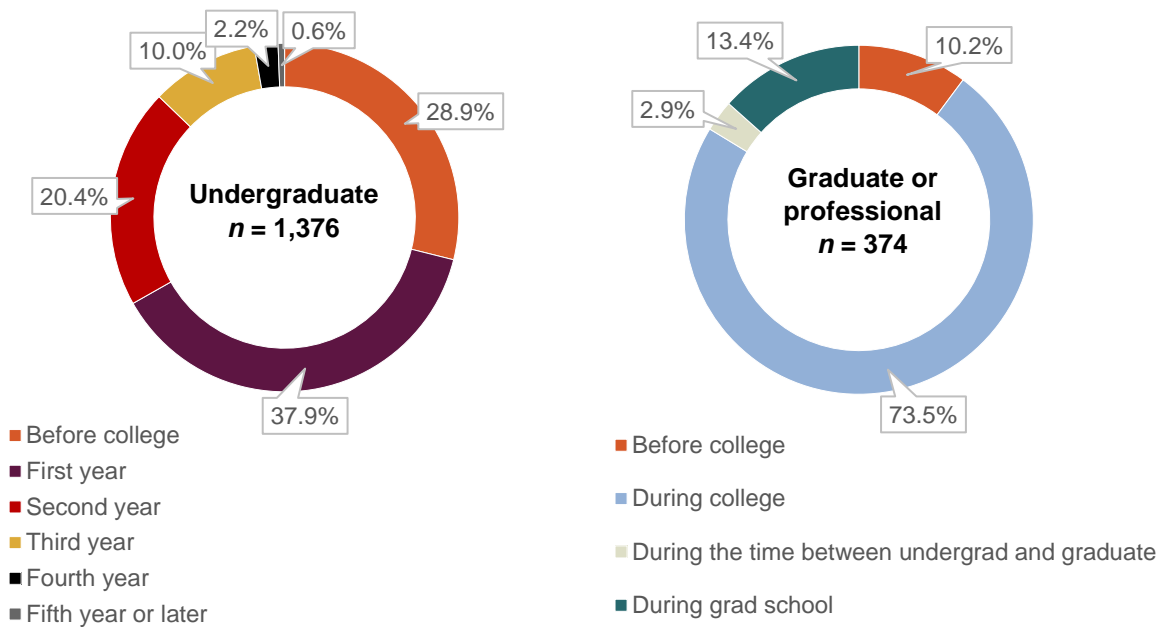
Use by class rank

When comparing non-medical use of stimulants between class ranks, 25% of respondents who had ever misused stimulants identified as fifth-year+ undergraduate students compared to 21.6% of fourth-year and 19.1% of third-year students. As illustrated in the chart below, the number of students that reported sedative misuse increased each year from first-year undergraduate (7.5%) to fifth-year+ undergraduate (15.1%). Among graduate and professional students who reported ever misusing prescription drugs, 10.5% of master's student respondents reported pain medication misuse, as well as 7.1% of doctoral students and 8.4% of professional students.



Note. The percentages reflect the percentage of students in each class rank that reported ever misusing prescription drugs.

Began using stimulants non-medically to study



It is important to recognize and assess when students begin to use prescription drugs for non-medical use. Of the students who reported ever misusing stimulants *to study*, 37.9% of undergraduate students reported that they began misusing in their first year of their degree and 28.9% reported that they began misusing before college. Among graduate and professional students, the majority (73.5%) of respondents reported that they began misusing prescription drugs during their undergraduate degree and 13.4% reported that they began during graduate school.

Frequency of stimulant misuse

Among undergraduate students who misused stimulants, 34.8% of first-year students reported that they used stimulants for non-medical reasons at least once a year, compared to 12.6% of fifth-year+ students. Of the students who identified as first-year undergraduates, 27.3% reported that they used stimulants at least once an academic term. This percentage increased slightly to 29.7% for second-year students and 32.6% for third-year students. 17.7% of first-year students who reported using stimulants for non-medical reasons indicated that they used stimulants at least once a month, compared to 14.0% of second-year students, 12.8% of third-year students and 14.5% of fourth-year students.

Among graduate and professional students who misused stimulants, 62.8% of master's students reported using stimulants for non-medical reasons less than once a year, compared to 71.7% of doctoral students.

Academic activities and stimulant misuse

Feel
behind

Test or
project

Exam
week

Of those who reported ever misusing stimulants to study, students reported various reasons about when they were more likely to misuse. Across all class ranks, students were more likely to report misusing stimulants when they feel behind in school work, before a test or big project, and during finals or exam week. Among undergraduate students who misused stimulants to study, 65.6% of these third-year students and 68.7% of these fourth-year students reported misusing stimulants during finals or exam week. Of third-year students who misuse to study, 33.3% reported that they misuse when they feel behind in school work, compared to 31.1% of fourth-year students. Among graduate students who misuse stimulants to study, 45.0% of master's students indicated that they misused before a test or big project, compared to 50.4% of doctoral students and 41.0% of professional students.

Frequency of sedative misuse

Of the first-year undergraduate students who misused sedatives, 16.3% reported that they used sedatives for non-medical reasons at least once an academic term. This percentage increased slightly to 21.2% for second-year students and then decreased to 18.2% for third-year students. Almost half (49.6%) of first-year students who reported using sedatives for non-medical reasons indicated that they used sedatives less than once a year, compared to 47.3% of second-year and third-year students, 48.7% of fourth-year students and 63.6% of fifth-year+ students.

In addition to undergraduate students, 62.0% of master's students who misused reported using sedatives for non-medical reasons less than once a year. Additionally, 65.6% of doctoral students and 62.5% of professional students reported misusing sedatives less than once a year.

Frequency of pain medication misuse

Of the first-year undergraduate students who misused pain medications, 11.8% reported that they used these medications for non-medical reasons at least once an academic term. This percentage increased slightly to 11.9% for second-year students and 15.6% for third-year students. 55.0% of first-year students who reported using pain medications for non-medical reasons indicated that they used pain medications non-medically less than once a year, compared to 59.4% of second-year students, 61.8% of third-year students and 66.1% of fourth-year students.

Among graduate and professional students, 78.2% of master's students who misused reported using pain medications for non-medical reasons less than once a year, compared to 78.1% of doctoral students and 76.7% of professional students.

MORE INFORMATION

The College Prescription Drug Study (CPDS) is a multi-institutional survey of undergraduate, graduate and professional students. The purpose of the CPDS is to gain a more thorough understanding of the non-medical use of prescription drugs among college students. Results provide a better understanding of the current state of non-medical use of prescription drugs on college campuses, including information on the types of prescription drugs misused, attainment of drugs, reasons for use and consequences of use. During spring 2018, the CPDS was administered to random samples of students attending institutions across the United States via an online anonymous survey.

Suggested Citation

College Prescription Drug Study. (February 2019). *An Overview of Non-Medical Use of Prescription Drugs by Class Rank: Research Brief*. The Ohio State University, The Center for the Study of Student Life, Columbus, Ohio.

If your institution is interested in participating in the next administration of the CPDS, please contact us at rxstudy@osu.edu.