



EMPOWERING PARENTS TO RAISE
THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SUBSTANCE-FREE

Talk Early And Often About Alcohol, Tobacco And Other Drugs, Even When It Gets Tough

Know! The Link Between Athletes, Injuries and Pain Pills

* Special thanks to "The Sports Doc" - Dr. Chris Stankovich, Professional Athletic Counselor

The abuse of prescription painkillers is on the rise among teen athletes. In a recently released study, 12% of male and 8% of female high school athletes reported abusing painkillers in the past year – a significant increase from previous surveys. But why the increase and what does this mean for our student athletes?

According to The Sports Doc, in addition to the overprescribing of prescription pain medications, possible reasons for the upsurge include new norms when it comes to injury and pain management, new or increased pressure for an athlete to quickly play again, a player's fear of losing a starting position or a fear of missing out on a potential scholarship opportunity - due to an injury. Pop culture doesn't help either, as our young athletes see what appears to be super-human pro-athletes suffer severe injuries, then jump back into the game shortly thereafter - with the help of pain medication. In an interview with The Sports Doc, he said, "These new pressures, group dynamics, and future sport goals sometimes converge to create a 'perfect storm' where otherwise healthy, level-headed kids uncharacteristically consider using dangerous pain pill drugs."

Allison Sharer, substance abuse prevention expert, asks parents, coaches and student athletes to keep it in perspective, "Pain is like the body's check engine light, letting us know something is wrong. An athlete's injury pain may be relieved (or masked) by painkillers, but that doesn't mean his/her body is in the right condition to get back out there just yet." She said medication should be thought of as a tool, but certainly not the answer.

The two most common situations that start athletes down the path to pain pill abuse is when a player gets hurt and is prescribed a pain medication or when an injured teammate shares his/her prescribed pain pills with fellow players. In any case, the use of these powerful prescription drugs has the potential to progress into an addiction. When the script runs out, some teens turn to the black market to obtain more pain pills. If that doesn't work, some resort to a cheaper, more accessible drug - heroin. "Young athletes who become addicted to pain pills (or heroin) almost always start out using simply wanting to get back on the field; it is only later that they become addicted to the drug," The Sports Doc said.

The Sports Doc warns, "Children need to understand, this is not a drug to be messed with." When used legitimately and appropriately, under a doctor's supervision, prescription pain medications can be a helpful tool. But the abuse of these meds is dangerous and can be deadly. Parents and children need to be aware of the high potency of these drugs, also called opiates or narcotics, along with the potential risks that accompany their use. Parents are strongly encouraged to include this topic in their regular and ongoing prevention conversations with their children.

If an injury occurs, the key is to help your child manage the pain and accompanying stress in healthy and safe ways:

Talking regularly with kids about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using.

Know! urges you to encourage other parents to join Know!.

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- Your child may have a legitimate need for pain medication, however, you can advocate for the lowest dosage and duration to be prescribed – that will still ease your child’s discomfort.
- Do not blindly go with a doctor’s pain pill recommendation: ask questions and discuss all options before filling that prescription.
- Consider other pain management possibilities: alternatives may include imagery, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, acupuncture, etc. (check with your physician).
- Build confidence in your recovering athlete: help your child develop specific, measurable and controllable goals during the rehabilitation process.
- Help your child maintain his/her athletic identity: make a kind request to the coach for your child to remain a part of the team while rehabilitating.
- If necessary, explore mental health options.

Keep in mind, there is no prototype of the “addicted athlete.” They are as varied as the kids who play sports. If your athlete does endure an injury, The Sports Doc encourages parents to fully engage in the rehabilitation process, “Do your homework, be a critical consumer, and remember, you are your child’s strongest advocate.”

For more information and resources from **The Sports Doc**, please visit <http://www.drstankovich.com/>.

Sources: Interview with Chris Stankovich Ph.D., “The Sports Doc,” January 2015. Chris Stankovich, Ph.D. - Student Athletes at-risk for Prescription Pain Pill Abuse. Bryan Denham, Clemson University, South Carolina: Trends in Substance Use among High School Athletes, 2014. Taylor & Francis Group: Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse High School Sports Participation and Substance Use: Differences by Sport, Race, and Gender, [Volume 23, Issue 3](#), 2014. Allison Sharer OPCS II, Director of Programs, Drug Free Action Alliance.



Dr. Chris Stankovich is a professional licensed athletic counselor and the Founder of Advanced Human Performance Systems. His work has been featured in USA Today, ESPN, and ABC World News and he has developed a variety of programs and products designed to help with happiness, health, and peak productivity. For more information please visit www.drstankovich.com