



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 helps put 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. The Sports Doc says, “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

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

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become addicted to the drug,” He also said it is also important to keep in mind that there is no prototype of the “addicted athlete.” They are as varied as the kids who play sports.

“Children need to understand, this is not a drug to be messed with,” The Sports Doc warns. 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.

Teachers, you are encouraged to make this topic part of your regular and ongoing prevention conversations in the classroom – making all students aware that when abused, prescription pain pills, also called opiates or narcotics, are highly potent, highly addictive and potentially lethal.

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. Website: <http://www.drstankovich.com/>. [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids: National Study: Teens Report Higher Use of Performance Enhancing Substances, 2014.](#) [Search Institute: 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents](#)



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



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