

Nearly a third of college kids think ADHD meds boost grades

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(HealthDay)—Many college students who abuse ADHD drugs

mistakenly believe that doing so will lead to better grades, a new survey suggests.

Past research has found that [college students](#) commonly misuse [stimulant](#) medications such as Ritalin and Adderall as "study aids." That's despite the fact that there is no evidence the drugs help kids who do not have [attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder](#) (ADHD).

The new study said that roughly 29 percent of students at nine U.S. colleges thought that stimulant medications boost [school performance](#). Many others—38 percent—were "unsure."

And that misperception was especially common among students who admitted to abusing the drugs.

Just over 11 percent said they'd used stimulant medication for "non-medical" reasons in the past six months. And of that group, almost two-thirds believed the drugs would improve their grades.

The findings came as no surprise to Dr. Jess Shatkin, a professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at NYU Langone Medical Center, in New York City.

But they do highlight an ongoing issue, according to Shatkin, who wasn't involved in the study.

"When kids do not actually have ADHD, these drugs are not helpful for their school performance," Shatkin said.

More concerning, he said, are the risks of misusing the medications—such as altered heart rate and blood pressure, insomnia, heightened anxiety, and even hallucinations.

"So no, we do not want students abusing these drugs," Shatkin said.

How do you stop them? It's possible, according to Shatkin, that if more college kids are aware of the reality—that their grades will not see a Ritalin-fueled rise—then fewer will try the drugs.

But, he said, the medications are effective at one thing: Helping harried college students stay up later.

"So they'll at least finish that paper that's due tomorrow—even if they won't get better grades," Shatkin said.

It all points to wider issues, according to Shatkin: Many college students need help with basics like time management, dealing with stress, and knowing how to generally take care of themselves.

Dr. Matthew Lorber is director of child and adolescent psychiatry at Lenox Hill Hospital, in New York City.

He said stimulant abuse is a common problem not just among college students, but high school kids as well.

When Lorber prescribes stimulants for children with ADHD, he encourages parents to "hold on" to the drugs themselves. That will limit the chances of their child sharing the drugs with their friends.

He also counsels teens on the risks of medication-sharing once they are on their own at college.

"We need to be discussing the dangers of these drugs for people who don't have ADHD," said Lorber, who wasn't part of the study team.

The findings are based on a survey of almost 7,300 [college](#) students.

None had ever been diagnosed with ADHD.

Overall, students who believed that stimulants improve school performance were 2.5 times more likely to abuse the drugs, versus their peers who were "unsure." And students in that unsure group were about twice as likely to misuse stimulants as those who did not believe the medications helped with grades.

Like Shatkin, Lorber said that trying to disabuse kids of that notion is unlikely to be enough.

"But," he said, "it's information they should have—along with information on the risks of misusing stimulants."

He encouraged parents to talk to their kids about those dangers, just as they would when it comes to alcohol or illegal drugs.

Shatkin recommended the discussions be even broader than that. "What do you do when you're depressed? What do you do when you're stressed? We often don't have these conversations with kids," he said.

Shatkin also suggested that parents be mindful about how much pressure they put on their kids to succeed at school. "We don't want them to catastrophize over every grade," he said.

The study was published earlier this year in the journal *Addictive Behaviors*.

More information: Amelia M. Arria et al. Perceived academic benefit is associated with nonmedical prescription stimulant use among college students, *Addictive Behaviors* (2017). DOI:

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The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more on [misuse of prescription drugs](#).

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