

## **“Any Questions?” Podcast Transcript**

### **Episode 15 : Prescription Stimulant Misuse**

*[Jazzy Instrumental Intro Music]*

**Demi:** Welcome to Any Questions, a University of Maryland podcast by students, for students. I'm Demi, my pronouns are she/they and I'm a third year peer influencer.

**Jerry:** And I'm Jerry. I go by he/him pronouns and I'm also a third year peer influencer. And today our conversation will be about prescription stimulant misuse.

**Demi:** Before we get started, we want to point out that we are not experts on prescription drugs or drug misuse. That being said, we know that prescription drug misuse is something that impacts a lot of people. So we set out to learn more about this topic and start a conversation peer to peer on how it impacts college students on our campus and nation-wide.

**Jerry:** We also want to acknowledge that when used as intended under proper instruction from a medical health professional, prescription stimulants are a beneficial way to treat a variety of conditions. Because of this, we encourage proper use of prescribed drugs for people who are currently benefiting from them, or are seeking treatment.

**Demi:** With that being said, let's dive in! So Jerry, what are prescription stimulants and why are they referred to as study drugs when people misuse them?

**Jerry:** Yeah, totally. An important place to start. So, prescription stimulants are FDA approved drugs that are prescribed by certified health care professionals. They're typically used for treating diagnosed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or ADHD and they're also used to treat narcolepsy. Two of the most common drugs are adderall and ritalin.

**Demi:** So in general, prescription stimulants increase dopamine and norepinephrine activity in the brain, leading to an increase in heart rate and blood pressure and also a decrease in blood flow. When used as intended, the person prescribed these medications can feel more alert and have higher levels of focus and energy.

**Jerry:** Because prescription stimulants are known to help with focus and attention, misuse is very prevalent especially in college campuses. So can you explain for us what constitutes drug misuse?

**Demi:** Well, drug misuse is an umbrella term for using a drug in any way other than intended. So for example, misuse occurs when someone takes another person's prescribed medication, takes medicine in a dose other than what was prescribed or takes medication to experience psychoactive effects.

**Jerry:** So, now that we know what prescription stimulants are and what drug misuse is, we can explore the risks of taking prescription stimulants without a prescription.

**Demi:** Like with other prescribed drugs, prescription stimulants can have a negative impact on your body when taken with other prescriptions or substances like alcohol and other recreational drugs. This is only one of the reasons why it's important to take prescription stimulants with the guidance of a healthcare professional.

**Jerry:** For sure, especially in our college community, understanding that prescription drug misuse does not occur in a vacuum but in the context of university life and the pressures existing in that life it's important to understand the problem itself. So, how does prescription stimulant misuse affect college campuses? Let's look at the numbers and see.

**Demi:** According to a spring 2019 survey from the National College Health Assessment 5.9% of college students reported use of prescription stimulants that were not prescribed to them. That's about 1 in every 16 students. Considering that this rate was higher than the misuse of other prescription drugs like sedatives and painkillers, this statistic only highlights the impact that prescription stimulants have on our community.

**Jerry:** That's right. As college students, it is helpful to learn just how impactful prescription drug misuse generally affects people who share our lived identity. So we can relate and apply the information into our own lives.

**Demi:** Now that you mention it, do we know how prescription stimulants affect college students who actually go to UMD? How does it impact UMD specifically? Maybe from, I don't know, the National College Health Assessment data collected from Spring of 2019.

**Jerry:** Funny that you mention it because we do. According to that National College Health Assessment data reported in Spring 2019. At UMD, approximately 7% of students reported using prescription stimulants that were not prescribed to them in the last 12 months.

**Demi:** However, we should acknowledge that this information is based off of self-reported data. But we are reassured that the data just about aligns with the National College Health Assessment's national average.

**Jerry:** Alright, we've gone over a ton of info on what prescription stimulants are and how they affect college students. But where does that leave us?

**Demi:** You know, talking about the impact of prescription stimulant misuse on college campuses and how it applies to our community made a bunch of questions run through my head. Why do college students misuse prescription stimulants in the first place? And what can we do to help lower prescription stimulant misuse?

**Jerry:** Okay, let's start with unpacking why students misuse these drugs in the first place. As we all know, college can be really stressful sometimes. Our schedules are packed with studying, and working, and maintaining a social life and other responsibilities that we have to keep up with.

**Demi:** Definitely. And like we mentioned before stimulants increase dopamine and norepinephrine activity. Stimulation of norepinephrine receptors causes an increase in heart rate and blood sugar metabolism while decreasing blood flow, culminating to a heightened perception of your surroundings. Also, increased dopamine receptor activity reinforces the reward responses in the brain, allowing people to stay focused and awake longer.

**Jerry:** People who misuse prescription stimulants can have intentions of enhancing their study or their social life. It is also known to be taken to stay awake while misusing other substances like alcohol. However, these cases of misuse are not shown to lead to their desired effect and they can also lead to serious consequences.

**Demi:** For instance, misuse of prescription stimulants can lead to behaviors that impact your academic success. Stimulant misuse is associated with misuse of other substances and behaviors like skipping class more frequently and studying less.

**Jerry:** Along with academics, stimulant misuse in social settings can lead to complications especially with the addition of other substance misuse.

**Demi:** Like alcohol as mentioned earlier.

**Jerry:** Right. It is not only a common myth that prescription stimulants can help you stay awake at parties when you've had a lot to drink but it could also be dangerous.

**Demi:** Prescription stimulant misuse can conceal the effects of alcohol, making it harder to gauge intoxication level while also forcing your body in two directions as stimulants and depressants are sending conflicting signals. More severely, cardiovascular complications can develop and can increase the chance of alcohol poisoning and some symptoms can even be fatal.

**Jerry:** Along with adding the misuse of other substances. Another reason why prescription stimulants need to be prescribed by a licensed professional is because they interfere with other prescribed drugs that you may be taking or can affect other medical disorders that you may live with including cardiovascular and psychiatric illnesses.

**Demi:** Addiction is another issue for prescription drug misuse. Frequent misuse can lead to the augmentation of dopaminergic receptors which are again, the receptor triggering reward response leading to a higher need for stimulant use. Misuse of prescription stimulants can also cause withdrawal symptoms if increased neurotransmitter needs are not met.

**Jerry:** The final cause for concern is the potential of a high dose consumption. Symptoms of a high dose consumption of prescription stimulants include emotional lability, anxiety, twitchiness, aggressiveness, loss of appetite, confusion, dizziness or blurred vision, insomnia, headaches, sweating, and dryness of the mouth and eyes.

**Demi:** Although these drugs are safe when used under the guidance of a medical professional there are still dangers to be cautious about when it comes to the misuse of prescription stimulants.

**Jerry:** Therefore, it is important to find other ways to achieve the desired outcome of “study drugs” that do not involve substance misuse. So, what can we do as alternatives for misusing prescription stimulants?

**Demi:** Practicing good study habits is key to avoiding stress and burnout. This can mean different things for different people so let’s go over some general tips.

**Jerry:** Tip #1: Take breaks. When you have a lot on your plate like studying for multiple exams or doing assignments, it’s super important to take breaks from time to time. There are tons of ways to do this like following the pomodoro method or just taking time to pause between assignments. Do whatever feels best for you.

**Demi:** Tip #2: Take care of yourself. It can be easy to fall into the habit of constantly doing work but taking care of yourself should be the top priority. Drinking water, getting enough sleep, and eating can help you feel better overall and give you the energy to be productive and stay awake when you need to. Remember, you can’t pour from an empty cup.

**Jerry:** Tip #3: Scheduling. Using a planner or a calendar app can help you lay out all of the responsibilities you have and prevent you from having too many tasks to complete at a time. Allocating time for specific tasks can ensure that you put your best effort into each item on your to-do list.

**Demi:** And Tip #4: Using UMD’s resources. UMD has tons of different study resources like tutors through academic departments and guided study sessions. It can also be helpful to attend your professor’s office hours and talk to your TAs. They can help walk you through content that you’re having difficulty with and answer any questions that you might have.

**Jerry:** UMD has resources to help with stress management like meditation services and the counseling center and these resources are free for students so check them out.

*[Jazzy Instrumental Transition Music]*

**Demi:** Before we go, let’s do a quick recap.

**Jerry:** Prescription stimulants can be a great tool to help treat a variety of conditions when prescribed by a medical professional. However, plenty of college students misuse these drugs.

**Demi:** 5.9% of college students nation-wide reported use of prescription stimulants that were not prescribed to them and 7% of UMD students reported doing the same.

**Jerry:** People misuse prescription stimulants for a variety of reasons but misuse can cause a variety of issues. Taking prescription stimulants can cause people to stay awake and feel more energized. However, taking these drugs without the supervision of a medical professional can negatively impact your health and academic performance. It's also a violation of the UMD Code of Student Conduct.

**Demi:** Prescription stimulants can interact with other drugs in your body such as other medications, alcohol or other recreational drugs. This is why it's super important to only take prescription stimulants as directed by a healthcare professional.

**Jerry:** And that's all that we have for today. It is very possible that we left you with more questions than answers but that's okay. There are still so many questions that I have as well but hopefully the conversation can draw some focus to this important discussion of the problems of prescription stimulant misuse so we can continue to work towards more solutions.

**Demi:** Thank you so much for listening and we'll see you next time!

**Madeleine:** Thanks for tuning in to this episode of Any Questions. As a reminder, stress management consults are a free service for students through Health Promotion and Wellness Services here at the Health Center. Interested in chatting with an expert about prescription stimulant misuse? Check out our substance use consultations also available for free through HPWS. Be sure to tune in for our next episode where we will be highlighting our amazing meditation services. Until next time, be well!

*[Jazzy Instrumental Outro Music]*