



PRESCRIPTION TALK GUIDE FOR ATHLETIC TRAINERS

THE ATHLETIC TRAINER'S CLIPBOARD

Athletic trainers are in an important position when it comes to promoting the safe use, safe storage, and safe disposal of prescription medications to their athletes. While participating in sports can decrease the risk that a student would abuse prescription drugs, injuries due to sports can often lead to a student being prescribed pain medications like opioids, putting student athletes at a higher risk for abusing prescription medications.



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THE ATHLETIC TRAINERS'S ROLE

PRESCRIPTION EDUCATION

Why is opioid education and awareness necessary?

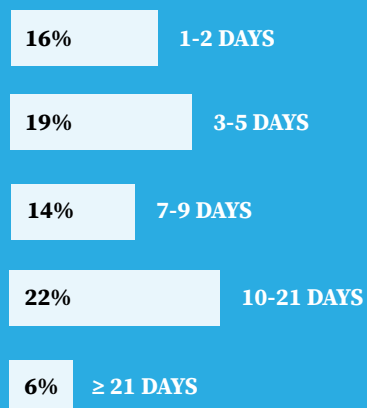
Prescription education is necessary for adolescents because they are at risk to access certain types of highly addictive pain medications, such as prescription opioids. Most adolescent athletes do not report misuse of opioid pain relievers, but athletes in certain sports may be more likely to access or misuse prescription opioids than non-athletes.^{1,2} Even with lower reported rates of prescription opioid misuse from adolescents in recent years, the risk of misuse or abuse in the foreseeable future is not entirely eliminated. Rates of opioid misuse have increased exponentially in post-adolescence (18-25) with nearly 1.7 million young adults who misused prescription pain relievers in the past year.³ It is important for adolescents to receive the appropriate education and awareness of opioid pain relievers to equip them with the knowledge and skills to make healthy decisions as they grow and develop.

What can an athletic trainer do for prescription education?

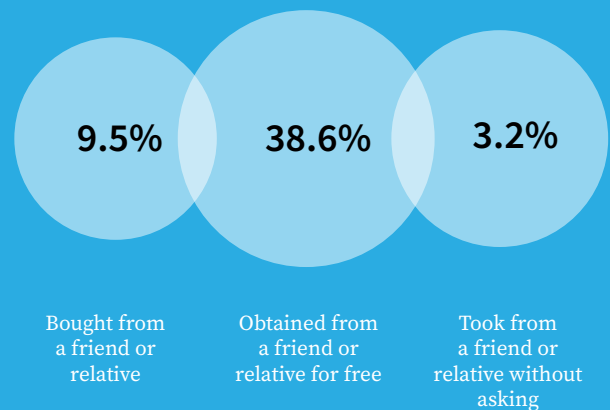
An athletic trainer's role is to help athletes work through their recovery from sports injuries in the safest way possible. The time athletes and athletic trainers spend together addressing injuries is valuable. Student athletes often look up to and view their athletic trainers as leaders they trust, look to for support, and are willing to listen to advice on important subjects such as, athletics, academics, and even simple conversations about the safe use of prescription drugs. Athletic trainers have the ability to be knowledgeable about methods for the safe use, safe storage, and safe disposal of prescription drugs. Their role allows them to build positive relationships with athletes and their parents and easily share information while bridging conversations with all audiences involved (athlete, coach, and parents).

Athletic trainers have great influence on the student athletes they work with and should continuously look for ways to help them succeed on and off the field. Regardless of the path a student athlete takes after their high school career, the need for education on prescription drugs is vital. During the early stages of adolescence as the brain is still growing and developing, the misuse of prescription drugs, especially highly addictive drugs such as opioid pain relievers, can alter development, affect the reward system, and lead to increased risk of addiction as an adult. Athletic trainers have the ability to talk about the safe use of prescription medication and all medications with their student athletes, and especially their injured student athletes. Monitoring an athlete throughout their recovery journey can allow an athletic trainer to continue building a trusting relationship, but also allow the trainer to notice any sudden changes in mood, weight, interest in activities, etc., that could indicate misuse.

Average time lost for injuries among high school athletes⁴



Sources of pain reliever access for most recent misuse (of those aged 12 and older)³



WHY ATHLETES & PARENTS?

Due to the emotional and physical nature of athletics, many athletes are exposed to pain through sport related injuries. On average there are nearly two million injuries that occur each year as a direct result of participation in high school athletics.^{5,6} Of the eight million athletes who participate in high school sports each year, almost a quarter report pain to varying degrees.

The elevated level of pain experienced in certain sports can lead athletes to seek pain management solutions. Common types of medications used to help treat pain include over the counter (OTC) drugs and prescription drugs. More serious injuries expose athletes to a wider array of stronger pain management medications such as prescription opioids, which have shown to be addictive and fatal if used improperly. Because of the potential for exposure to prescription opioids, it is important that athletes, parents, and coaches are all educated and aware of safe use practices for these drugs if prescribed by a doctor or healthcare professional. Education and awareness provide the foundation for individuals to make safe and informed decisions. By encouraging safe use, safe storage, and safe disposal of all prescriptions, coaches can influence athletes and their parents to responsibly use all medications.

Participation in sports can act as a protective factor against the misuse of certain drugs for adolescent athletes. However, athletes are still at risk to access certain types of medications, which may leave them susceptible to potential drug diversion to peers and/or misuse. According to an exploratory study that assessed the risk of lifetime opioid use among college students, students who participated in at least one interscholastic sport during high school had greater odds of lifetime medical prescription opioid use on multiple occasions and greater odds of being approached to divert their prescribed opioid medications compared to peers that did not participate in a sport.⁷ Providing athletes with the knowledge to safely use their medications and not divert them to others is essential in allowing them to make healthy decisions.

Parents have opportunities to support their athletes as they encourage them to be champions for each and every decision they make. A significant way that parents can make a difference is by speaking with their doctor, asking questions, and starting informative conversations with their athletes about these types of drugs. According to the Partnership for Drug Free Kids, during the last conversation teens had with their parents about substance abuse, only 16 percent said they discussed the abuse of prescription pain relievers with their parents.⁸ It is necessary for parents to have a complete understanding of prescription opioids and be willing to have appropriate conversations with their athletes about these types of drugs.

Safe Decisions

Begin with simple conversations

1

LEARN the Facts

Educate yourself about the substances that athletes have access to, and be aware of the methods for safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs. Be aware of and know common types of opioid pain relievers such as Oxycodone and Hydrocodone that might be prescribed to athletes for pain. By learning the facts, you can teach your athletes and their parents how to make safe chemical health decisions.

2

START the Conversation

Athletic trainers should start the conversation with their athletes and their parents about the safe use, safe storage, and safe disposal of prescription medications. It is important to ask questions and continuously follow up with any injured athletes throughout their recovery journey. This allows an athletic trainer to continue building a trusting relationship, but also allow the trainer to notice any sudden changes in mood, weight, interest in activities, etc., that could indicate misuse.

3

KNOW the signs of Misuse

By carefully monitoring your athletes and offering support and guidance, you can keep them on a path to achieving optimal performance.

- Confusion
- “Pinpoint” pupils
- Drowsiness
- Sudden weight loss
- Sudden and dramatic mood swings
- Visiting multiple doctors
- Withdrawing from social activities



Education and awareness provide the foundation for individuals to make safe and informed decisions.

OPIATES

Opiates are substances that derive from natural compounds of the opium poppy plant - from a species of poppy called the *Papaver Somniferum*. Over twenty alkaloid compounds have been isolated from this plant, with certain ones (morphine, codeine, and thebaine) occurring naturally in larger amounts.⁹ Morphine and codeine are the most commonly recognized opiates, typically combined with other non-opioid pain relievers such as aspirin or acetaminophen to produce certain types of prescription medications such as Tylenol #3 (codeine/acetaminophen).

OPIOIDS

Opioids are a class of drugs that includes heroin, prescription pain relievers such as oxycodone and hydrocodone (i.e., Oxycontin[®], Percocet[®], Vicodin[®]), and dangerous synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, carfentanyl, and other analogues. Opioids work in the brain to reduce pain and can also produce feelings of relaxation and euphoria.¹⁰ A common way to identify various types of pain relieving substances is to describe them as opioids, but the terms “opiate” and “opioid” are often used interchangeably.

PRESCRIPTION PAIN RELIEVERS (PAINKILLERS)

Prescription pain relievers (painkillers) are drugs such as Oxycodone (Oxycontin[®], Percocet[®]) and Hydrocodone (Vicodin[®]). These drugs typically need a doctor’s prescription, but have been increasingly diverted, misused, and abused. Many types of prescription pain relievers are also known as prescription opioids.

NARCOTICS

The term “narcotic” comes from the Greek word “narco”, which means sleep or stupor, and originally referred to a variety of substances that dulled the senses and relieved pain.¹¹ Though some people still refer to all drugs as “narcotics,” today “narcotic” refers to opium, opium derivatives, and their semi-synthetic substitutes.

ANALGESICS

Analgesics are drugs that can help relieve pain without loss of consciousness. These drugs can be further classified into opioid and non-opioid (acetaminophen and NSAID’s) analgesics. This term can also be used interchangeably to describe opioids and may be referred to as “opioid analgesics”.

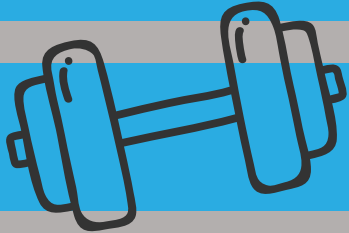
PRESCRIPTION DIVERSION

Prescription diversion is the sharing or selling of one’s own or another individual’s prescription medication. Prescription diversion is a common method of access for those who misuse prescription pain relievers. Of those aged 12 and older who misused prescription pain relievers in the past year, 53% of those individuals were given by, bought from, or took the substance from a friend or relative.¹²

PRESCRIPTION MISUSE & ABUSE

Prescription misuse is using a prescription in a way other than how it is prescribed by a healthcare professional. This includes taking a dose at the wrong time, accepting prescription medications from a friend, taking drugs for reasons other than what they were prescribed for, or not following medical instructions as labeled or directed. Prescription abuse is using a prescription with the intent of experiencing a “high” associated with the drug. The most recognizable difference between prescription misuse and abuse is the intention that a user has when taking a drug.

What can Athletic Trainers do to prevent opioid misuse?



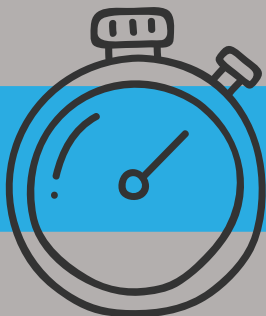
Know They Have Influence

Athletic trainers are in an important position when it comes to promoting safe opioid use and preventing opioid misuse. These relationships may provide mentor-like support and guidance for student athletes, and allow trainers to add personal influence to the expectations and rules about drug use that high school sports follow.



Know the Signs

Athletic trainers can be one of the first in the line of defense when it comes to recognizing questionable decisions or behaviors of their athletes. By carefully monitoring your athletes, offering support and guidance, and setting a positive example, you can keep them on a path to achieving optimal performance.



Start the Conversation

Initiate conversations about safe use of prescription drugs and other medications with your athletes. Proper education and awareness of prescription drugs, including opioids, will allow your athletes to continue making safe and informed decisions.



ATHLETIC TRAINERS'S CHECKLIST

INFLUENCE SAFE CHEMICAL HEALTH DECISIONS

✔ Complete each checkpoint as you educate and provide awareness on safe chemical health decisions for your athletes, parents, and others in the community.



Learn from Healthcare Professionals and Educate Yourself

Speak up and ask questions about various types of prescription drugs that your athletes, parents, or others in the community might have access to. Learn about medications and have a complete understanding of safe use, storage, and disposal.



Start the Conversation With Parents and Others

Help others learn more about prescription drugs from the information you have acquired from doctors, healthcare professionals, and other credible resources. Initiate meaningful conversations that influence healthy prescription decisions.



Bring Awareness to Safe Use, Storage, and Disposal

Continue the conversation by disseminating information to others through e-mails, flyers, social media posts, and newsletters, ex. parent letter on page 15. This will highlight safe prescription use for others, and will help address the implications of improper prescription use.



Inform Community Members About Drug Take Back Locations

There are free prescription take back locations across the United States, with many offering 24/7 anonymous drop off capabilities. Visit <https://takebackday.dea.gov/> to find the the nearest location. Inform others on how they can get involved and discard unused medications that might be lying around the house.



Get Involved in National Drug Take Back Days

National drug take back days are typically sponsored by the DEA and occur twice each year. Find ways to get your athletes, schools, and entire community participating in these events to help with safe disposal of prescription drugs.



Brainstorm Ideas With Your Athletes and Their Parents

Work with your athletes and their parents to brainstorm initiatives to get others to make healthy decisions when it comes to safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs and other medications.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR ATHLETES AND PARENTS

1

WHAT ARE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS?

How many types of prescription drugs can they name? Assess your athletes' and parents' knowledge of prescription drugs and look to fill in areas where they are lacking information or are misinformed.

2

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

Do they know the differences between prescription drugs and over the counter (OTC) drugs? Explain how these drugs might be different in terms of accessibility and strength per medication.

3

WHAT IS AN OPIOID?

Can athletes and their parents identify an opioid if given the opportunity? Explain various types of legal and illegal opioids and detail how these drugs might be used.

4

WHEN MIGHT THEY BE USED?

Can athletes and their parents provide examples of how they may come in contact with prescription opioids or other prescription drugs? Look to see if they can identify how these drugs can be safely used if prescribed.

5

WHAT IS MISUSE AND ABUSE?

Do athletes and parents know the consequences that can result from improper use of prescription opioids? Explain how misuse and abuse of prescriptions can hold them back from achieving optimal performance.

6

WHERE SHOULD THEY BE STORED AND DISPOSED?

Where are medications stored in the household? Educate about the implications of improper storage and teach safe storage practices. Explain how medications can be safely disposed once they are no longer needed.

Visit ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/toolkits/ to download additional worksheets to help you start the conversation with your athletes and parents.

ANSWER SHEET

1

Prescription painkillers, prescription depressants, and prescription stimulants are all types of prescription drugs. Examples include Vicodin[®], Oxycontin[®], Percocet[®] (prescription painkillers), Valium[®] and Xanax[®] (prescription depressants), and Adderall[®] and Ritalin[®] (prescription stimulants).

2

Prescription drugs are typically prescribed by a doctor and can be purchased at pharmacies with a prescription, whereas over the counter (OTC) medications are substances that can be purchased normally off shelves in stores without a prescription. When prescribed, prescription drugs are intended for one person at a time. Certain types of prescription drugs can be stronger than some over the counter drugs depending on the dose, time period, and medication taken.

3

Opioids are a class of powerful and potentially addictive drug that include the illicit drug heroin and legal prescription pain relievers, such as oxycodone (OxyContin[®], Percocet[®]), hydrocodone (Vicodin[®]), codeine, and morphine. Opioids work in the brain to reduce pain and can also produce feelings of relaxation and euphoria.

4

Athletes can be prescribed drugs such as opioid pain relievers if they experience a severe injury and require pain management solutions. These drugs can also be prescribed from doctor and dental visits. Prescription opioids might be accessed through friends, family members, or medicine cabinets at home.

5

Prescription misuse is using a prescription in a way other than how it is prescribed by a healthcare professional. This may include taking a dose at the wrong time, accepting and taking prescription medications from a friend, taking drugs for reasons other than what they were prescribed for, and not following medical instructions as labeled or directed. Prescription abuse can occur when users attempt to experience a “high” associated with taking a prescription drug. The most recognizable difference between prescription misuse and abuse is the intention that a user has when taking a drug.

6

Choose a safe location to store your medications that is up and away and out of sight from others in the household. Sometimes the medicine cabinet is not the best location to store prescriptions because of its ease of accessibility. If you choose to store medications in a cabinet, install a locking mechanism or find a lock equipped medicine cabinet to replace your old one. Other options include prescription lock boxes, household safes, and counting the doses of medication that remain after each use.

DON'T BE A SPECTATOR

WHEN IT COMES TO **EDUCATING** YOUR ATHLETES
AND THEIR PARENTS ABOUT PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS

[LEARN MORE | ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/](http://ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/)



1

SAFE USE STARTS WITH YOU

Safe use of medications, especially highly addictive opioid pain relievers, will reduce the risk of substance misuse or abuse.

2

SAFE STORAGE IS WITHIN REACH

Safe storage of medications will create a safe environment for others in the household such as young children & adolescents, visitors, and pets.

3

SAFE DISPOSAL IS A SOLUTION

Safe disposal of medications will allow you to discard unused prescriptions to prevent diversion or accidental consumption of a substance.



1

Safe Use Starts With You

Understanding safe use of prescription drugs will greatly reduce the risk of diversion, misuse and abuse of certain substances. Improper use of prescriptions often stems from a misunderstanding of medications and failure to acknowledge the potential risks associated with these drugs. Another factor that has largely contributed to excessive numbers of misuse of various prescription drugs across the country is a lack of education.

The safe use of prescription drugs includes taking the medication as prescribed by your doctor, but also taking the right amount in the right time frames given. Taking more than the recommended dose or taking the medication more frequently than prescribed is considered misuse. Encourage the safe use of prescription medications by encouraging your athletes and their parents to follow dosage directions closely.

Increased education and awareness of prescription drugs can help provide individuals with tools to make safe and informed chemical health decisions.



2

Safe Storage Is Within Reach

You can safely store prescription opioids or other medications in the household so that they are not visible or accessible by family members, friends, or visitors.

Unfortunately many adults report unsafe storage methods of prescription opioids, even in households with children and adolescents. Given that large numbers of individuals who misuse pain relievers access them from friends or family members, there is a need for increased emphasis on safe methods of storage.

You can ensure safe storage and prevent improper or unintended consumption of substances by encouraging your athletes' parents to safe guard their prescriptions, monitor their medicine cabinets, and by guarding and discarding miscellaneous medications. This can be achieved by installing a lock equipped medicine cabinet, storing prescriptions in household safes or prescription lock boxes, and counting the number of doses that remain after each use. Safe storage will keep unnecessary prescriptions out of easy to access areas and reduce unintended consumption.



3

Safe Disposal Is a Solution

Safe disposal will reduce the likelihood that medications will be available to be misused, diverted, or abused by others. There are several ways that you can discard prescriptions to protect those in the household and the environment.

The FDA currently regulates and provides recommendations that vary based on specific medications, particularly highly addictive opioid pain relievers that should be disposed of immediately. However, prescription take back locations and community drug take back events offer some of the safest ways to discard a variety of substances. Thousands of free drug take back locations exist across the United States, with certain locations offering 24/7 anonymous drop off capabilities. Drug take back days are typically sponsored by the DEA and occur twice a year.

Encourage your athletes and their parents to safely dispose of any unused medications, by promoting DEA Drug Take Back Days each year, and DEA Drop Boxes all year round.

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Other Resources

- NIDA for Kids - teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids
- CDC - [cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html)
- FDA - [fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/InformationbyDrugClass/ucm337066.htm](https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/InformationbyDrugClass/ucm337066.htm)
- Partnership for Drug Free Kids - drugfree.org/drug/prescription-pain-relievers-opioids/
- Illinois Youth Survey - iys.cprd.illinois.edu/
- Monitoring the Future - [monitoringthefuture.org/](https://www.monitoringthefuture.org/)

Hello Athlete Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I'm so glad to have the opportunity to work with your student athlete. Through regular check-in's with them, I plan to help them work towards recovery in the safest way possible.

It is my understanding that your child has been prescribed pain relief medication by their doctor to support them in the recovery process. Please take a moment to review the following information and safety precautions when it comes to prescription medication use:

- Safe Use:** Please help to ensure that your athlete is only taking the medications as frequently and in the quantity prescribed. Should that not feel adequate for the current levels of pain they are experiencing, be sure to consult their doctor before altering dosage. Should your athlete feel that their pain is not excessive, they may be able to reduce the amount of pain medication taken and use alternative pain relief methods including physical therapy exercises, icing, massage therapy, etc. Again, consult your doctor regarding any changes.

- Safe Storage:** Parents, safeguard medication in an area not accessible to your athlete and other children or pets in the household. Lock up medications in lock bottles or a locked storage cabinet. It is encouraged that parents distribute the prescribed amount of medication to your child, and relock the medication after doing so.

- Safe Disposal:** When your athlete no longer needs the prescribed medication, be sure to dispose of it appropriately so it is not sitting around for accidental or continual use. Many communities have 24/7 drug disposal drop boxes and/or host bi-annual Drug Take Back Days.

You can find those here: <https://takebackday.dea.gov/>

You can also use at-home disposal items like Deterra pouches. Learn more: <https://deterrasystem.com/>

Prevention of misuse and abuse is incredibly important for people of all ages. However, for our adolescents, this is particularly important as their brains are still developing through their mid-late 20's. These years are critical for development of the brain, particularly regions of the brain that assist in impulse and emotional control. The misuse of prescription drugs, especially highly addictive drugs such as opioid pain relievers, can alter development, affect the reward system, and lead to increased risk of addiction as an adult.

For more information, learn more at <http://ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/> or by following them on Facebook: @ILHPPRxPlaybook and Twitter: @IL_RxPlaybook.

Please help us ensure the safety of all through the prevention of prescription misuse and abuse to continue keeping our athlete's healthy!

Sincerely,

Your Athlete's Athletic Trainer





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